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Why Violent Ethnic Mobilizations Occur and Persist: A Case Study of Violent Ethnic Mobilization in the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria

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Thesis Abstract

Within the academic field ethnic conflict studies and resolution, this research investigates the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilization in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

Using the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic approach to the study of ethnic violence as a theoretical and analytical guide, the project examines why violent ethnic mobilisation has continued to persist in the aforementioned region despite governmental efforts at eradicating it. This is the core issue around which the project's research questions articulate. The principal argument presented and defended here is that existing causal explanations for violent ethnic mobilization and its persistence in the Niger-Delta region are inadequate and incomprehensive. They are merely some narrow and isolating extrapolations of the classical modernist constructivist and instrumentalist doctrines which have been judged inadequate in accounting for why violent ethnic mobilizations occur and persist. Arguing within the ethnosymbolic paradigm, the thesis contends that a robust theory of ethnic violence ought to be the sort that creatively and purposively combines, rather than isolate, relevant logics of existing theoretical explanations of ethnic violence. Only in this way would it be capable of proffering a more adequate and comprehensive framework for examining, explaining, and resolving the conundrum of violent ethnic mobilization, particularly in the aforementioned region under investigation. Ethnosymbolism, the chosen theoretical framework for this thesis, accomplishes just that.

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Author’s Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

This thesis is an ethnosymbolic investigation into the reasons for the occurrence and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisations in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Using the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theoretical framework as a guide, the project seeks to offer a robust explanation for why violent ethnic mobilisation has continued to persist in the aforementioned region despite governmental efforts to eradicate it.

The project is set within the academic discipline of ethnic conflict studies and resolution where it contributes more specifically to the literature on violent ethnic mobilisation.

The field of ethnic conflict studies has come a long way. Until recently, Horowitz (1985; 2000) notes, this academic field of enquiry has been disparagingly spoken of as the backwaters of the Social Sciences. Some of its potent critics, such Brubaker and Laitin (2004:92), expressed doubts that the discipline had either a clearly demarcated subject matter, or an agreed-upon set of assumptions, or an organised body of literature. These putative shortcomings are equally among the reasons why Gilley (2004) made a case for abandoning the field of ethnic conflict studies outright. All these notwithstanding, the discipline has made tremendous progress over the years, to the point that it can no longer be reasonably or validly regarded as a backwater of social sciences. There is now an explosion of serious literature on the subject of ethnicity and its relationship to politics, distributive justice and violent conflicts. Now, more than ever, scholars are highly aware of ethnicity's potency as a community-building force in moderation; and as a community-destroying momentum in excess (Horowitz 2000: xvi). Ethnic conflicts, scholars in this area of study assume, embody some regularities and recurrent patterns, and could therefore be studied for the purpose of understanding why and how they occur, so as to be able to effectively address them with a view to creating and advancing the atmosphere of peace that is so earnestly needed in our present world. Horowitz's (1985) ground-breaking seminal work in the field, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, is a significant effort in this direction. Nnoli (1989; 2008) accomplishes a similar feat, but with a more tailored focus on Africa and Nigeria. The current thesis, which focuses on the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is another useful addition to this academic field of study, to which an increasingly large quantity of literature is being constantly added.

Traditionally, scholars of violent ethnic conflicts have studied their subject matter from a fairly wide range of theoretical approaches. These approaches, varying as they are, may, according to Horowitz (1998), be roughly categorised into **hard** and **soft** views. On one hand, there exist scholars who conceive of ethnic conflict, theoretically, as rooted in biological, unconstructed, fixed, non-rational or emotional impulses. Proponents of the primordialist doctrine of ethnic conflict belong to this camp. Primordialism as an approach is now considered obsolete and has been historically superseded. On the other hand, however, those other scholars who conceive of violent ethnic conflicts as rationally and strategically constructed realities aimed at obtaining some pre-conceived benefits belong to the soft camp. Constructivist and instrumentalist theorists of ethnic violence, such as the economic inequality theorists, manipulative elite theorists, resource curse theorists, rational choice theorists, and security dilemma theorists amongst others, fall under this category – the soft camp (Horowitz 1998).

More recently however, an increasing number of scholars has come to acknowledge that the phenomenon of violent ethnic conflict is rather more complex than is normally thought, and that none of the above-mentioned theoretical leanings is capable, individually, of offering a comprehensive and robust explanation for the occurrence and persistence of ethnic violence. Because of this there is now a gradual shift towards ethnosymbolism – an approach that is regarded as more comprehensive due to its ability to creatively and purposively synthesise the relevant logics of existing theories of ethnic violence in order to robustly account for why ethnic violence occurs and persists. Although ethnosymbolism was initially introduced as an approach for studying national violence, Smith (2009) does acknowledge that it may also be meaningfully employed in studying violent ethnic conflict situations. In 1985, in his work *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Horowitz made the first laudable attempt to develop, based on the principles of ethnosymbolism, a more comprehensive and universalizable explanation of why ethnic violence occurs and persists. In 2001 and 2006, Kaufman's more tailored use of ethnosymbolism offered a persuasive explanation of extreme violent conflicts in the Balkans. In recent times, literature on ethnosymbolism has been on the rise, and understandably so, because it is currently the most thoroughgoing and comprehensive approach for explaining the phenomenon of violent ethnic conflict. It is equally for this reason that the current thesis has adopted it as the framework for examining the enigma of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Research Problem

Violent ethnic mobilisation is one of the major security challenges of our time. Though prevalent in many young and emerging states of Asia and Africa, this phenomenon is by no means limited to these continents alone. It is a globally pervasive problem, even if most countries of Europe and America have made substantial progress in checking it (Horowitz 2000, Wolff 2006; Cordelle and Wolff 2010). The focus of the current research, however, is Nigeria and its Niger Delta region.

The commitment to eradicate, or at least minimise, the spread of ethnic related conflicts is constantly renewed at every level of the Nigerian federation. However, the country's Niger-Delta region remains one of the *loci* where the positive impacts of these conflict resolution efforts are yet to be fully and durably experienced – for violent ethnic mobilisation continues to persist in that region, notwithstanding a series of governmental efforts to eradicate it. It is with this puzzling observation that this research began.

The Niger-Delta region is situated in the oil rich South-southern part of Nigeria, covering about 70,000 square kilometres (Ploch 2013). The region contains the largest oil deposit in Africa, which is considered one of the world's best and highly sought-after oils due to its low sulphur content (Watt *et al* 2004). The oil produced in the region accounts for more than 93 percent (some reports peg it at 95 percent) of Nigeria's economy. Because of this, the economic and geo-strategic significance of the Niger Delta region is not in doubt. Paradoxically however, this region, although extremely rich, is still, by all parameters of measurement, one of the poorest and most polluted human habitats, not only in Nigeria, but across the entire globe (Ikein *et al.* 2008; Ikein 1990; Khan 1994; Watts 2009). The existence of poverty and outdated or dilapidated infrastructures, and poor educational and healthcare facilities are, when compared with most other regions of the country, significantly high in the Niger Delta region. The apparent injustice and socio-economic inequalities existing between this oil-rich but poor region and other parts of the country have been thought to provide a fertile ground for the mobilisation of violent ethno-regional organisations such as the Egbusi Boys, Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDF), and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), amongst others. Gilbert (2013), argues that MEND is the most organised and sophisticated, and best-armed ethnic militia group in the country. Created in 2005, the group came into the limelight in 2006 when it launched an attack on Shell's oil facilities and abducted four of the company's expatriates, demanding the sum of 1.5 billion

US Dollars to compensate the people for the years of accumulated environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, due to the careless and unethical oil exploration methods used in the region (Akpan 2010; Asuni 2009: 17-18). This mode of operation is not limited to MEND alone. In the region under review, it is fairly normal for ethnic militia groups to intermittently mobilise violently as a means of pressurising the Nigerian government to address, not only the socio-economic imbalance between the Niger Delta area and other constituent regions of the country, but also the unique environmental challenge faced by the region due to the unethical extraction of crude oil by multinational oil companies.

Over the years, the Federal Government of Nigeria has employed several policy-informed strategies to end the problem of ethnic violence in the region. These strategies include, but are not limited to, the following: ***military repression***, ***increment of revenues allocated to the Niger Delta region,*** and ***the presidential amnesty programme***, which is similar to the United Nation's DDR (disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration) conflict mitigation and resolution strategy. The use of DDR in some of the conflict-ridden countries of the world such as Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Guatemala, Colombia, Cambodia and India, amongst others, has proven to be effective, and its positive impact has recently been confirmed by Kofi Annan, then Secretary General of the United Nations Organisation (United Nations 2000). The Nigerian version of the DDR is the 'Presidential Amnesty Programme' which was introduced in the year 1999 in view of resolving the problem of violent conflicts in the Niger-Delta region.

In retrospect, researchers have observed that these government interventions and strategies have not fully succeeded in delivering the desired positive result; for mobilisation to ethnic violence still persists in the Niger Delta. This startling observation brings up a fresh question about why the government's strategies have not been entirely successful. Such a question cannot however be fully addressed without first and foremost examining the robustness of the theoretical underpinnings of the conflict resolution strategies implemented by the government in the region. The analysis presented in this thesis reveals that the government's conflict resolution interventions in the Niger Delta have not been able to effectively resolve the regional conundrum principally because of the inadequacy of the theories that inspired them. The dominant perspective, drawn on extensively in the formulation of these government policy strategies, has been economic inequality theory. For example, the government's decision to increase the revenues allocated to the Niger Delta region stems from its narrow understanding of the causes of regional turmoil as economic. It was therefore hoped that increasing the region's economic or financial strength would effectively resolve the regional crisis. The same

is equally true of the presidential amnesty programme in the region which was designed to demobilise and economically empower the Niger Delta ex-militants.

This thesis argues, however, that economic inequality or marginalization, imagined or actual, in the Niger-Delta region, is not a sufficient causal explanation for the persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation there. If it were, one would expect that all other ethno-regional groups in Nigeria, who also complain about being economically marginalised, would also mobilise violently, just like the Niger Deltans. This however has not been the case; and their grievances have not transformed into full-scale violent upheavals. It is for these reasons that the current thesis is led to posit that there is more to the Niger Delta violent conflict than can be satisfactorily explained by the economic inequality argument that has formed the theoretical basis of the government's interventions in the region all these years.

This thesis does not deny that there is an economic dimension to the regional conflict. It clearly acknowledges this, and has devoted a whole chapter (Chapter 4) to explaining and affirming the role of interest, economic and otherwise, in the provocation and persistence of the regional conflict. This said, seeking to resolve the Niger Delta conflict solely from an economic angle will always miss the mark, because the regional conflict is more complex than is usually thought. A number of other factors such as the roles of chauvinist and opportunist elites, ethnic myths, passion and solidarity are equally relevant in understanding and explaining the mechanism of violent ethnic mobilisation and its persistence in the Niger Delta. So, any theoretical approach capable of robustly explaining and finding solutions for the problem of ethnic violence, particularly in the Niger Delta region, must be able to take all these contributory factors into consideration. At the moment only ethnosymbolism does so. Hence the reason for its selection as the theoretical guiding thread for the current research project.

Research Gap

Prior to the rise of Ethnosymbolism as a preferred intellectual paradigm for researching extreme ethnic violence, Primordialism, and modernist Constructivism and Instrumentalism were, at different historical epochs, predominantly used. Before the second half of the 20th century for instance, Primordialism constituted the principal theoretical framework within which the phenomenon of violent ethnic conflicts was investigated. As a naturalistic theory, primordialism holds that ethnic conflicts arises from some firmly established, permanent

natural or biological differences in ancestry or identity which cause individuals to take sides with their own ethnic group when violent conflicts occur between ethnic groups (Shills 1957; Geertz 1963). According to this perspective, ethnic identity is seen as congenitally acquired and therefore to naturally and inevitably bind people of the same ancestry, separating them and their ways of life from those of different ancestral stocks. Going forward, Geertz (1963:109-10; 1973) notes that one is bound to one's kinsmen and one's neighbour as a result, not merely of interest, or incurred obligation, but in great part, by the virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself. In other words, there is something impulsive, rather than rational, about aligning with and seeking to advance the interest of that ethnic group from which one is biologically or ancestrally believed to originate. Primordialists' basic submission here is that ethnic differentiation, as well as the conflicts that arise as a result, are natural rather than rationally constructed, and therefore inevitable and ineradicable. It is part of human nature. So long as people are biologically different, violent conflicts are bound to occur. This is, broadly speaking, the view of Primordialism.

This position has however been intensely criticised by scholars of the modernist tradition for failing to give serious consideration to the place of rationally conceived and strategically pursued competing interests (economic or otherwise), which are often associated with ethnic violence, or to the fact of variations in and dormancy of ethnic sentiments and conflicts over time (Glazer and Moynihan 1963: Greenberg 1980; Collier and Hoeffler 2000; Hoeffler 2012; Bayart 1993:51).

As the understanding and acknowledgement of the constructivist and instrumentalist dimensions of ethnicity and ethnic violence has grown, thanks to the increased use of more reliable historical and empirical modern social sciences research methods in the 1960s and beyond, the primordialist view has now come to be regarded as obsolete and superseded.

The overarching claim of Modernism is that ethnicity and ethnic violence, rather than being natural phenomena, are actually socially constructed, and susceptible to being instrumentalised for the attainment of some preconceived objectives (Bates 1974; 1983; 1997; Hechter 1986;1995; Fearon 1994; Chandra 2006). The so-called violent ethnic conflicts are, according to the modernist scholars, in fact, not ethnic at the very core. They are rather interest driven, rational, and socially constructed for the attainment of some preconceived objectives (Fearon 1994; 2003). Although ethnic violence may correctly be said to be constructed, there is always a limit to this construction. What goes into the configuration of ethnic violence is not all

arbitrarily fabricated in the present and with the full 'conscious intentionality' of ethnic conflict engineers, especially as the latter makes use of the pre-existing textures of popular and emotionally laden ethnic myths/symbols in arousing the ethnic population to collective violent action. These pre-existing textures of ethnic materials predate both the constructors of ethnic violence and the violent conflict that has been created; and by that very fact could not have possibly been wholly an outcome of their rational arrangement or construction. So, there is a limit to the *hic et nunc* construction of ethnic violence as modernist scholars suggest.

Over-emphasising the rational and intentional construction of ethnic conflict, as modernist scholars do, ignores the role of the so-called 'irrational' (ethnic myth and passion) in the provocation of ethnic violence. Yet, the role of 'ethnic myths' in arousing the passion needed for the actual onset and persistence of ethnic violence is well known, and persuasively defended in the writings of ethnosymbolic scholars. In his article 'Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice? Testing Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence', Kaufman (2006), drawing on the writings of experts in cognitive and behavioural psychology, explained how passion, not rationality, disposes and motivates people to act; and how ethnic myth is required in arousing these sentiments in people, and impels them to act as a collectivity. Similarly, in their respective works, Conversi (1995:73-4) and Ozkirimili (2010:168) each acknowledge that although violent ethnic conflicts are constructed, their construction relies on the pre-existing textures of ethnic myths, memories, values and symbols, solidarity and passion. So passion, as opposed to rationality alone, is required in mobilising ethnic groups to violent action; and any theory capable of satisfactorily explaining why violent ethnic conflicts occur and persist ought to be able to accommodate the role of ethnic myths and passion (the so-called irrationals) in the complex process of the evolution of ethnic violence. The mutually exclusive binaries presented by primordialism and modernism do not adequately capture the complex dynamics involved in ethnic violent conflicts. A robust theory of ethnic conflict should therefore be able to creatively synthesise and combine the relevant logics of existing theoretical explanations of ethnic violence in order to offer a more comprehensive account of why ethnic violence occurs and persists. Only in this way could the complex phenomenon of ethnic violence be better understood, leading eventually to the development of more adequate conflict resolution policies and strategies. Ethnosymbolism accomplishes this objective better than any other existing theoretical perspective of ethnic conflict. As Smith (1996:362) observes, ethnosymbolism does more than other approaches in explaining the power of myths, values and collective memoires in generating widespread popular emotional support and participation

in collective ethnic action. Quite unfortunately however, within the context of intellectual debates and policy formulations in the Niger Delta, ethnosymbolism is not being used. It is missing (*research gap*) and therefore needs to be introduced (*intended research contribution*).

Building on the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic tradition, this thesis puts forward ethnosymbolism as a superior perspective for understanding and solving the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta.

Ethnosymbolism as a theoretical approach was initially developed by Young (1976), but became increasingly associated with the works of Smith (1980, 1991), Connor (1994) and more recently Kaufman (2001; 2006); it is now increasingly preferred as a framework for examining violent ethnic conflict scenarios.

Aims and Objectives

This research project aims primarily to offer a robust explanation of why violent ethnic mobilisation has continued to persist in the Niger Delta region despite governmental efforts at eradicating it. It seeks to uncover the weaknesses of the strategies hitherto employed in solving the problem of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta region, and makes recommendations on how these weaknesses may be corrected in order to effectively resolve the regional turmoil.

The thesis contends that the conflict resolution strategies hitherto employed the government in solving the problem of violent ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta have not been entirely successful in delivering the anticipated positive outcomes mainly because they (the strategies) derive from inadequate and lopsided theories of ethnic violence that are simply narrow and isolating extrapolations from the modernist constructivist and instrumentalist doctrines which individually are incapable of adequately explaining or solving the phenomenon of ethnic violence. Hence the persistence of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta. As a way forward, this thesis puts forward and defends Ethnosymbolism as the most theoretically appropriate and adequate framework for understanding and resolving the enigma of violent ethnic conflicts, particularly in the Niger Delta. This is because ethnic conflicts are very complex phenomena that are hardly explained or resolved by individually isolating, rather than complementing, theories of ethnic violence. A robust theory of violent ethnic conflict ought to combine the relevant logics of existing theoretical perspectives of ethnic violence in order to proffer a more adequate explanation and solution. Ethnosymbolism does exactly this. The thesis is optimistic

that policies formulated in accordance with the ethnosymbolic theory proposed here will be able to address more effectively and sustainably the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation that currently rocks the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

Relevance

Nigeria (the Niger Delta is an integral part of Nigeria) was selected as the focus of our study for the following reasons. First, Nigeria is representative of multi-ethnic oil producing states. With over 250 identifiable ethnic groups co-habiting within its physical boundaries, albeit sometimes uneasily, Nigeria provides a good model for the study of resource-related violent ethnic mobilisation in deeply divided societies. Secondly, because of its representativeness, the outcome of our investigation can be meaningfully applied both in other African countries and beyond them, in countries that have similar concerns or dynamics. Thirdly, the relevance of the thesis extends to highlighting the need, not only to recognise the possible impact of ethnicity in violent ethnic mobilisation, but also the need to make provisions for this. Governments of ethnically divided societies, including Nigeria, tend quite frequently to understand ethnic conflicts as rooted only in clashes over interests (economic or otherwise), while ignoring the role of ethnicity (ethnic myths, solidarity, passion) as a mobilisation principle. This tendency or attitude accounts for why many conflict resolution strategies in Nigeria, and in some other African countries, fail to achieve their intended results. Part of the relevance of this project therefore lies in its ability to bring this issue to the centre of academic and policy debates in Nigeria and beyond.

Research Question(s)

The central question that the thesis asks is:

How may one explain the persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta despite the Nigerian government's efforts at eradicating it?

To properly address this key question, the following sub-questions, which guide the project's investigation, are also raised:

- Have competing interests played any role in the onset and persistence of the Niger Delta violent conflict? (Chapter 4)
- Have elites played any role(s) in the generation, escalation, and persistence of the Niger Delta violent conflict? (Chapter 5)
- Might have ethnicity, especially ethnic myth/symbol complexes, causally contributed to the spiralling and persistence of the Niger Delta violent conflict? (Chapter 6)

These sub-questions have been formulated in keeping with the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theory which inspires and guides the current research project. According to Kaufman (2001), for violent ethnic conflict to occur, the following three conditions are required: clash of interests, manipulative elites and ethnic myth-symbol complexes (ethnicity). These elements, according to him, interact in a very complex manner to generate and sustain ethnic violence. This research upholds this view as valid, and has therefore formulated its research sub-questions and interview questions accordingly. Ethnosymbolism, as well as the Kaufmanian version of it, is discussed throughout the thesis, and in greater detail in the theoretical chapter.

In this thesis, ethnic conflict is understood as a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet, from their individual perspectives, entirely just goals. Ethnic conflict is one such circumstance - in which the goals of at least one party to the conflict are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of the confrontation is one of ethnic distinction (Cordell and Wolff 2010).

Chapterisation

The thesis comprises six substantive chapters. In addition to these are the introduction and conclusion which, without doubt, are also essential and integral parts of the entire monograph. Below is a brief outline and overview of each chapter.

Thesis title

Why violent ethnic mobilisations occur and persist: A case study of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Introduction

The introductory section of the thesis presents the research overview, problem, question(s), aims and objectives, and research gaps, as well as how these will be filled.

The thesis may be described as an ethnosymbolic investigation into the reasons for the occurrence and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Using the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theoretical framework as a guide, it critically examines the mechanisms by which ethnic tensions metamorphose into full scale violent confrontations. It is in so doing that a more comprehensive understanding of why, to date, governmental efforts at eradicating the regional crises have not fully yielded the desired outcomes.

The principal claim that the thesis makes is that existing explanations for the mobilisation and persistence of ethnic violence in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria are incomprehensive and inadequate. They are merely narrow and isolating extrapolations of the modernist constructivist and instrumentalist doctrines which individually have been judged insufficient to explain holistically why violent ethnic mobilisations occur and persist in the region under study. The project contends that a robust theory of violent ethnic conflict ought to combine the logics of existing theories in order to proffer a more adequate explanation and solution of this regional violent conflict. Ethnosymbolism, the chosen theoretical framework for this project, enables us to accomplish just that. Understanding the complex dynamics of politically salient intra-state violent conflicts is a necessary precondition for designing appropriate conflict resolution strategies. The project therefore makes a positive contribution to political peace processes in Nigeria and beyond.

Chapter 1: theoretical perspectives on violent ethnic mobilisation

This chapter presents both the conceptual and the theoretical frameworks of the entire thesis. Content-wise, it commences by appreciating the fact that violent ethnic mobilisation is one of the issues that has gained a great deal of interdisciplinary attention. Psychologists, sociologists and political theorists have not only expressed concerned over the enormity of damage done and still being perpetrated on humanity by ethnic violence; but have also come up with variegated theoretical views on its origins, as well as proposals for its resolution. Such perspectives include ancient hatred, manipulative elites, economic inequality, rational choice and instrumentalism amongst others. In this chapter, these doctrines are discussed according to the intellectual traditions they fall under, namely, primordialism, modernism and ethnosymbolism. An important argument presented in this section is that the ideas championed by both the primordialist and modernist schools regarding the causes of ethnic violence tend to be mutually polarizing, rather than complementary. However, to attain an adequate understanding and explanation of the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation, a theory that combines the meaningful logic of already-existing theories is needed. It is for this reason that the project adopts the ethnosymbolic theoretical approach which combines the relevant logics of existing traditions in order to proffer a more adequate and comprehensive theory of ethnic violence in the Niger-Delta region.

Chapter 2: research methodology

This is the methodology chapter of the thesis. It presents the research method chosen for the current project, some justification for the choice, as well as its ethical implications and benefits. A case study research design has been chosen for this project. As opined by Yin (2013), this method is appropriate for studying real-life situations. The phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger-Delta is one such circumstance. Hence the propriety of the chosen case study research design. Within the framework of the chosen methodology, a semi-structured interview method is favoured as a means of data collection. As opposed to the fixed and rigid nature of structured interviews, the semi-structured alternative preferred in this project is more flexible. It outlines beforehand the specific questions to be posed, but also allows some room for discussing other related and relevant matters that might arise during the interview process.

Chapter 3: the context of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta

This section, which constitutes the background chapter, presents the context of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger-Delta region, as well as a selective tabular chronological timeline of Niger Delta events.

The Niger-Delta region is situated in the oil rich South-southern part of Nigeria, covering about 70,000 square kilometres (Ploch 2013). The region contains the largest oil deposit in Africa, which is considered one of the world's best and highly demanded oils due to its low sulphur content (Watt et al, 2004). The oil produced in the Niger-Delta region accounts for more than 93 percent (some would peg it at 95 percent) of Nigeria's economy. In view of this, the economic and geo-strategic relevance of the region is beyond doubt. Paradoxically however, this region that is so rich is still, by all parameters of measurement, one of the world's poorest human habitats (Ikein et al 2008; Ikein, 1990; Khan 1994; Watts 2009). The apparent economic inequalities between this oil-rich but poor region and other parts of the country have been thought to provide, among other factors, a fertile ground for the mobilisation of violent ethnic organisations. This chapter presents a narrative of the evolution of a series of ethnic violence that has rocked the Niger Delta region for decades, including the efforts hither-to made by Nigerian government to eradicate it. The chapter further examines whether or not these efforts have yielded the desired results. However, the conclusion reached here is that these efforts have not succeeded in yielding the anticipated results, for violent ethnic mobilisation continues to occur in the region even after the implementation of the said government strategies.

Chapter 4: interest as a generator of conflict in the Niger Delta

In any intellectually compelling discourse on violent ethnic mobilisation, 'interest' is a very important, if not an entirely indispensable concept. Rigorous academic investigations by modernist scholars reveal that 'interest' plays a vital role in the mobilisation and escalation of violent ethnic conflicts (Collier 2002; Horwitz 2000). Kaufman (2001) also does not hesitate to affirm that ethnic violence cannot occur unless there is some sort of interest at stake. The current chapter not only recognises the validity of these assertions, but equally uses them as a guide in its journey towards discovering the main interest at stake in the Niger-Delta's violent ethnic mobilisation. Our investigations and findings suggest that interest in 'oil wealth' is the

main stake in the regional turmoil. This opinion is further strengthened by referring to other regions in Nigeria without oil, which in spite of being poor and claiming to be marginalised, have not violently mobilised, mainly because there are no valuable resources(interests) worth fighting over in their territories.

Chapter 5: manipulative elites and violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta

In various scholarly analyses of the mechanisms by which ethnic tensions metamorphose into violence, the role of elites is frequently taken into consideration. Proponents of the elite manipulation theory of ethnic violence hold that elites are very pivotal in both the escalation and de-escalation of violent ethnic conflicts. As observed by Horowitz (2000) and Kaufman (2001) amongst others, elites, through some carefully fabricated ethnic rhetorics, arouse negative and hostile sentiments in the masses, causing them to violently rise in pursuit of some preconceived ethnic interests. Between interest and the escalation of ethnic violence is the mediated role of elites. Relying on the credibility of this theory, this chapter critically evaluates major violent ethnic conflicts in the Niger-Delta region in order to discover where the actions or the inactions of elites have led to the escalation of ethnic violence.

Chapter 6: Ethnicity: a causal factor in the Niger Delta violent conflict?

One of the most eloquent characteristics of modernist scholars of ethnic violence is their tendency to over-emphasise the constructivism, instrumentalism, and rationalism of ethnic violence, while downplaying or entirely negating the causal relevance of ethnicity in provoking and sustaining ethnic violence. This chapter considers that although the modernist perspective is valid, it fails to give a robust account of why ethnic violence occurs and persists, particularly in the Niger Delta. Its inability to take seriously the fact that ethnicity is a relevant, and indispensable causal factor in violent ethnic mobilisation renders it weak and insufficient to explain and provide solutions to violent ethnic conflicts. Following Kaufman (2001) this chapter contends that ethnic conflict is a complex phenomenon, and that neither primordialism nor modernism (constructivist and instrumentalist arguments), in isolation, is able to adequately account for why it occurs and persists. Hence the reason for the chapter's upholding of ethnosymbolism – a theoretical perspective that recognises not only the constructivist and instrumentalist dimensions of ethnic violence, but equally, the causal role of ethnicity in violent

ethnic mobilisation. This chapter argues, with concrete historical examples, that ethnicity is indeed a causal factor in violent ethnic scenarios such as those of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this project, as earlier stated, was to respond adequately to the question of why violent ethnic mobilisation has continued to persist in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria despite governmental efforts to eradicate it. This section presents a synthetic summary of how this question has been addressed. The thesis' conclusion is that ethnic violence persists in the Niger Delta area because of the weakness, lopsidedness and inadequacy of the modernism-inspired policy strategies hitherto applied in addressing the regional turmoil. It is for this reason that the thesis maintains that policies capable of effectively resolving the Niger Delta conundrum ought to be inspired by Ethnosymbolism - a theory which combines the relevant logics of existing theories of ethnic violence in order to offer a more comprehensive theoretical base for understanding, explaining and finding solutions to the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation, particularly in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ETHNICITY AND VIOLENT ETHNIC MOBILISATION

This section presents both the conceptual and theoretical frameworks for the project.

I begin here with critical definitions of some of the key concepts employed in the research, including ethnicity, ethnic conflict, ethnic mobilisation, and tribe. To reduce semantic ambiguities and fully appreciate the purview of the thesis, a proper understanding of the meanings of the above-mentioned concepts, as well the senses in which they are employed in the research, is necessary and worth elaborating in detail. Before delving fully into the conceptualisation of the term ethnicity - a concept that is central to this project, it has been judged worthwhile to begin with the clarification of the difference that exists between it (ethnicity) and another closely related but biased term: 'tribe'. Not infrequently, several unsuspecting writers, as well as members of the public, use these concepts interchangeably. This is due largely to their close definitional resemblance. However, the concepts are not identical (Wright 1999; Jenkins 2008; Hounet 2010). In this chapter, I have tried to identify the biased, ideological and unscientific origin of the term 'tribe' and argued for its replacement with a more adequate concept: ethnicity.

Following the clarification of concepts is a critical evaluation of some of the relevant existing theories of violent ethnic mobilisation. This is done in order to carefully select a theory, or combination of theories, that best suits the research purpose. As mentioned in the introduction, the theoretical approach adopted for the project is Ethnosymbolism - the strand developed by Kaufman. This choice is based on its increased acceptance and use in academia as a framework that offers a more comprehensive and balanced account of ethnicity and ethnic violence, as well as on its ability to clearly and successfully explain the mechanism by which ethnic tensions evolve into full scale violent turmoil.

I turn now to the next section to evaluate the concept of 'tribe', presenting an argument for its abandonment, especially with regard to this research.

From Tribalism to Ethnicity

The term ‘tribe’ is a concept that is commonly employed in the analysis and interpretation of socio-political affairs in Africa. Its use has become so pervasive and entrenched that many Africans now innocently and uncritically speak about themselves in tribal terms. The aim of this section is to critically review the term, identify its many biases, and then make a case for its jettisoning.

Etymologically, the term tribe comes from the Latin word *tribus* , meaning “[a] group of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor” (Oxford English Dictionary, IX 1933: 339, as cited by Fried 1975: 7). As a concept, it emerged around the period of the early formation of the Roman empire. In its original sense, there is nothing overtly troubling or suspicious about it. However, when employed in descriptions of socio-political affairs in Africa, the term is rather provocative and objectionable.

In Africa, the concept of tribe has a colonial origin and is intricately linked with the project of colonialism (Nnoli 1978; Thomson 2010; 2016). As rightly observed by Berman (1998), colonialism was a bureaucratic apparatus of socio-political and economic domination and exploitation, rather than a school of democracy. This was the primary objective of colonialists, who did not hesitate to employ whatever measure aided its realisation, no matter how base. Describing the colonised people in tribal terms was one of those measures. During this time, the term ‘tribe’ was emptied of its original meaning and given a new and derogatory connotation that specifically described Africa and their way of life as primitive, uncivilised, uncritical and barbarous; as opposed to the European way of life. Franz Fanon (1963: 210) notes that such bastardisation of the collective self-image of a people through the perverted colonial logic turns to the past of the oppressed people, distorts, disfigures and destroys it. The correlation between the bastardised people’s self-worth (collective low self-esteem) and the lack of human development and progress is evident in the work of some contemporary scholars such as Charles Taylor (1994) and Will Kymlicka (2000) among others.

Because this thesis recognises that the concept of tribe is a heavily and passionately contested concept when speaking or writing about Africa, I have decided that it should be entirely done away with in this project. The decision to do so is not entirely new. Earlier, Mamdani (1976) had for instance wondered why a small collection of Norwegians and Icelanders were referred to as peoples or nations, while larger African collectivities, such as the Hausa-Fulanis or the Igbos were referred to as tribes. His conclusion was that only racism could have been the

reason. From the time when the use of this term was first challenged, by Franz Fanon in 1966 and Mamdani in 1979, to date, a host of other scholars such as Wright and *et al.* (1999), Jenkins (2008) and Thomson (2010) have also joined hands to advocate for the total deletion of the concept, especially when speaking or writing about Africa. Understandably, there might still be a number of individuals who innocently employ the term in its original and non-ideological sense; and who may still want to retain the intellectual liberty to continue to use it. However, in order to avoid semantic ambiguities and unnecessary tensions associated with the term, it is preferable to abandon its usage altogether. There was certainly a time, as Mamdani (1976: 3) observed '…when the word possessed a scientific content, when it characterised those social formations that did not possess a state - the communal, classless societies, as for example, the Germanic tribes'. But today, with the twisted and ideological use of the term by the colonialists or neo-colonialists in derogatorily describing African affairs and people, the term has lost its 'scientificity', and there is now a good case for jettisoning and replacing it with a more scientifically appropriate concept: ethnicity. The latter, unlike the term 'tribe', is deemed more appropriate because it is bound neither by space nor time. It non-discriminatorily captures the socio-political and cultural dynamics that are universally observable among peoples. Inter-group conflict, which was one of the reasons why Africans were once disparaged and labelled as tribal by the colonialists, is equally empirically observable in the France's Basque, amongst the Catalans of Spain and in the uneasiness existing between the Welsh, Scottish and English in the United Kingdom, but the term tribe has for instance not been extended to descriptions of these European groups and their states of affairs. For this reason, the use of the term tribe is worth abandoning, and will in fact not be used in this project, which investigates the drivers of violent conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Having presented in the foregoing some arguments in favour of the concept of ethnicity rather than tribe, it is worthwhile that the next section be preoccupied with the elucidation of the concept of ethnicity. This concept is central to the project, and therefore deserves elaborate consideration.

Ethnicity: etymology and usage

The term ethnicity has a very rich history. Its most visible academic relevance emerged in the early 19th century (Gabbert 2006). Etymologically, the concept comes from the Greek word *ethnikos,* and its adjective *ethnos* (Kiwuwa 2012) which simply translates as a people or a

nation (Stone 1996) or a collectivity of human beings living and acting together (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996). In French, the Greek noun *ethnikos* and its adjective *ethnos* survive as *ethnie* and *ethnique* respectively. The English language has no corresponding terms for *ethnos (ethnie)*, but scholars commonly translate it as: ethnic community or ethnic group (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 3) – and this is the sense in which it is used in this thesis. The term ethnicity is relatively recent. Its first recorded appearance in English was in the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* of 1953 (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 4; Mann 1983). One of the earliest articles in this category states: 'ethnicity seems to be a new term' (Glazer and Moynihan 1975: 1). Although the term itself is quite new, the idea of common kinship, group solidarity and common culture to which it refers is old. Ethnicity has always been, and still remains, one of the basic modes of human association and interaction (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 3).

The sense in which the term *ethnos* (ethnic group) is used has evolved radically throughout history. In ancient Greece, it was originally used to refer to non-Jewish pagans or non-Christians. At the same time, it was also used in other senses, to refer for instance to *hetarion*: a band of friends; *ethnos Lukion*: a tribe of Lycians; and *ethnos melisson*: a swarm of bees or birds (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996: 4). In the nineteenth century, *ethnos* acquired some racial characteristics, and was used in the twentieth century to refer to immigrants to the United States of America other than people of Northern or Western European descent (Eriksen 2010: 3-4), although the reason for this lacuna is unclear. Obviously, explanations for this are likely to vary from one individual to another. But for the sake of scientificity, and in keeping with Mamdani's argument above, one would have anticipated that the use of the term be extended to these others as well, that is, immigrants who were not of Western European descent.

The 1960s was also a period marked by the consolidation of the process of decolonisation in Africa and Asia as numerous new nations were created. *Ethnos* or *ethnie* became, during this epoch, a novel vocabulary used to designate a socio-political unit whose members were related by kinship ties. It was the efforts of anthropologists, mostly Europeans, to make sense of types of socio-cultural formations in Africa and Asia, that led to the term's rise in prominence within the disciplines of the social sciences (Eade 1996: 58).

From the foregoing, it is evident that the term has been employed in a plurality of senses. Not even in the Greek setting from where the concept originated was it employed in a univocal sense; and scholars do not hesitate to acknowledge this definitional conundrum. Kiwuwa (2012: 7), for instance, is firm in his assertion that ethnicity still remains a heavily contested

concept. Tonkins *et al* (1989: 11) also points out that the term suffers from conceptual elasticity covering a wide range of ideas, thus rendering it a catch-all phrase for social features and organisations such as language, religion, customs, castes, culture and race. Currently, the concept languishes between both polysemy- a multiplicity of definitions - and synonymy – enjoying a similarity of meaning to other terms such as 'race' and 'caste' (Green 2006:2). All this makes the concept semantically ambiguous. For this reason, it is important to delimit how the term is understood and employed in this thesis.

This research project does not pretend to be capable of immediately resolving the definitional enigma that has existed for centuries. Although meaningful attempts in this direction will not be entirely excluded, the primary task at this point is to carefully examine various academic definitions of the concept and in carefully selecting one, or some combination of them, that is most suitable for our research purposes. In the pages that follow, some important competing definitions of the concept of ethnicity will be presented.

Ethnicity: academic definitions

There is a fairly large number of definitions of the concept of ethnicity. However, I shall commence here by presenting and comparing some of those that are widely used in academic literature, beginning with the most influential definition, that of Max Weber. For the latter, 'Ethnic groups are those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists' (Weber 1968: 389, cited in Hutchinson and Smith 1996:35).

For Horowitz, 'ethnicity is based on a myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Some notion of ascription, however diluted, and affinity deriving from it are inseparable from the concept of ethnicity' (Horowitz 1985: 52).

For Smith and Hutchinson (1996: 6), an ethnic group is a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity'.

Fearon and Laitin (2000: 20) define an ethnic group as 'a group larger than a family for which membership is reckoned primarily by descent, is conceptually autonomous, and has a conventionally recognised natural history as a group'.

Some of the key elements that figure in the above definitions are common ancestry or descent, collective historical experience and memories of it, common culture, conceptual autonomy. Of all these, however, the idea of common ancestry or descent seems to be the most important, and all the definitions above felt the need to capture it. What varies only relates to how this combines with other elements in defining the concept of ethnicity. Now, given the apparent pertinence of this notion of common ancestry, it is important to clarify how it is understood and employed in this project.

Does common ancestry simply mean the traceability of members of an ethnic group to the same biological ancestral stock? From what we currently know about ethnic groups, this is unlikely to be the case, for ethnicity incorporates a wide range of individuals far too large and complex to make it possible to trace them back to a single ancestral tree. In the US and UK for instance, blacks are grouped as an ethnicity, even though the designation incorporates individuals from Nigeria, Ghana, Jamaica, and the Caribbean (amongst others) with far distant ties (Chandra 2006). To this effect, common ancestry ought not to be understood in the strict sense of consanguinity as primordialist scholars such as Shills (1957) and Gertz (1963) do. This is perhaps why the addition of the term 'myth' by Horowitz (Horowitz 1985: 52) and Smith and Hutchinson (1996:6) in their definitions of ethnicity presented above is very important. It at least shows that *imagined*, rather than *historically factual*, common descent or ancestry is a more reasonable way of understanding this feature of an ethnic group or ethnicity.

The importance of origin or descent lies in the fact that it helps us, together with another closely related concept – culture - to distinguish an ethnic group from association with class, which has to do with the economic position of individuals in the process of production. The main criteria for class membership, for instance, is neither origin nor culture, but one's position in the complex system of production (Gabbert 1992: 32-44). In this project, the concept of ethnicity does not imply the idea of class, although I do appreciate the fact that occasionally, both ethnicity and class could coincide in an ethnically plural society. Here, however, they are treated as distinct concepts.

Another concern that deserves some attention here concerns how ethnicity can be distinguished from other similar concepts such as kinship and extended family, which also lay claim to

common descent as an indispensable feature of their definitions. To clarify this, I have found the opinion of Gabbert (2006: 88) quite helpful, at least in initiating the discussion. The latter opines that 'only categories that are related to the idea of common descent, and integrate several families and kin groups should be referred to as ethnic'. However, the problem with this view is that the concept of nation also incorporates these. Like ethnicity, nations are imagined communities (Anderson 19991; 2016). They both incorporate smaller socio-cultural categories such as extended families and kinship groups and local communities. This therefore brings up a fresh need to further contradistinguish the concepts of nation and ethnic group. One distinguishing feature, and perhaps the only one that is widely alluded to in influential scholarly definitions of the concept of nation, is the idea of a people desiring political autonomy for and by its members. Nationalism is a political project of self-determination. As Mill (1861) states (among other things) nationalists desire to be under the same government which is ruled either 'by themselves or a portion of themselves'. This import is equally present in definitions given by Haas (1986), Smith (1991), Nodia (1994), and Barrington (1997). An ethnic group on the contrary does not seek political independence from the state, of which it is a constituent part. In this lies the difference between a nation and an ethnic group. In this thesis, this is the sense in which the difference between a nation and an ethnic group is understood and communicated.

In the foregoing, I have dwelt much on clarifying the manner in which the concept of ethnicity is understood and employed in this thesis; as well as how it differs from other similar concepts such as nations, kinship groups and class. In what follows, I determine which of the definitions of ethnicity above, or combination of them, will be adopted as the most suitable for the project.

Of all the definitions of ethnicity outlined above, the one put forth by Smith and Hutchinson has been selected as the most appropriate in the context of this research. This is because it embraces and integrates all the important elements found in other definitions. But unlike them, it goes further to include the following features which capture and describe the characteristics of the ethnic groups of the Niger Delta (which this research project investigates) such as: name, culture, myth of common origin, homeland, sense of solidarity. The ethnic groups we are investigating have definite names, myths that make reference to common descent, and some collective historical experiences, including the socio-political and economic marginalisation they have collectively endured. All these contribute to giving them a sense of solidarity as a people, making it easier for them to mobilise more easily for collective ethnic action. This ability to mobilise is further facilitated by the fact that they occupy a specific geographical location, a factor cited by Toft (2003) and Kaufman (2001) as very important for violent ethnic

mobilisation to occur. No other definition captures these features better than the one produced by Smith and Hutchinson (1996: 6). This therefore renders it more comprehensive. It is because of its comprehensiveness and 'greater completeness' that it has been chosen as the standard definition of ethnicity for this project.

Another important concept worthy of consideration at this point is that of 'ethnic conflict'. This concept is defined in the next section, and the sense in which it is employed in this project is explained.

Ethnic Conflict

The term 'ethnic conflict' is at the centre of the project. Following Horowitz (2000), this thesis recognises that although ethnicity is community-building on the one hand, it could also be a source of tension and conflict within an ethnically plural and deeply divided society such as Nigeria on the other. However, the interest at this point is not in the positive impact of ethnicity (though this is not entirely ignored), but rather in the polarization and conflicts that it sometimes enables.

Before proceeding with the elucidation of the concept of 'ethnic conflict', it is important to clear up some confusions often associated with the term. Ethnic contestations are not necessarily about ethnicity. By this I mean that ethnicity is not the ultimate irreducible generator of conflicts of an ethnic sort (Brubaker and Laitin 1998: 425). Although ethnicity often forms part of the explanation for any conflict rightly considered as ethnic, there is hardly any turmoil that is entirely reducible to ethnicity as its ultimate and sole cause. Analysis of civil wars that took place between 1945 and 1999 has shown that ethnic or religious diversity does not necessarily render a society susceptible to large scale violence (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Esman 2004: 6). This corroborates the hypotheses that ethnic plurality is not an indispensable condition for conflict. Most inter-ethnic relations have been and continue to be conducted peacefully. Even when *ethnies* harbour grievances against one another, governments and political leaders have often tried to manage the situations in a very pacific manner, so that tensions do not escalate into violent confrontations between ethnic groups. Instances from Tanzania, Switzerland and Canada, amongst other ethnically plural societies, testify to the fact that political tensions arising from ethnic or cultural diversity could still be managed in a way

that does not terminate in violent confrontations or civil wars (Esman 2004). We now turn to the definition of the term 'ethnic conflict'.

The term conflict, generically speaking, denotes a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet, from their individual perspectives, entirely just goals. Ethnic conflict is one of such circumstances - that in which the goals of at least one conflict party are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinctions (Cordell and Wolff 2010). A similar definition is found in Crawford and Lipschutz (2000) who state, though in a loose sense, that ethnic conflicts are political or social violent confrontations involving one or more groups that are identified by some marker of ethnic identity. In ethnic conflicts, at least one of the conflicting parties refers to its distinct ethnic identity as being the reason for marginalisation, exclusion, or denial of rights and privileges. Hence ethnic conflict is a form of group conflict, except that at least one party in the conflict expresses its dissatisfaction in ethnic terms (Cordell and Wolff 2010). In political science discourses, conflict is generically understood to refer to competition among groups for power, resources, opportunities, status, or respect, competition that is usually pursued and adjusted by peaceful means, but may under some circumstances turn violent (Esman 2004: 6; Varshney 2007). Accordingly, a distinction is therefore made between violent and nonviolent conflicts. Our concern here however is with violent ethnic conflict; that is, those ethnic tensions that have evolved into violence. This is the sense in which the term will be employed throughout the project, and the thesis will look at why and how ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria have resorted to systematic, strategic, and sustained use of violence to pursue their objectives. This precludes random riots, even if they are intense and demonstrate the grievances of a particular ethnic group.

The foregoing has dwelt extensively on conceptualising, analysing and defining some of the major concepts employed in the research. In the next section, the question of whether or not ethnicity matters is briefly examined.

Does Ethnicity Matter?

There is a close relationship between ethnicity and politics (Thomson 2010). In Africa, but also in many other parts of the world, ethnicity often intrudes into politics. In contemporary Nigeria, ethnic division is pervasive, and the majority of Nigerians define themselves in ethnic, rather

than in national terms. Such identification carries a number of political consequences, as both children and adult are socialised or simply taught to give preference to people of the same ethnic background, not only during elections, but also in other social and bureaucratic dealings, over those of different ethnic origins (Osaghae and Suberu 2005; Price 1973: 470-75; Klineberg and Zavalloni 1969: 131; Horowitz, 2000: 6). In deeply divided societies such as Nigeria, ethnic allegiances have an enormous impact on a number of issues such as employment, political appointments, development plans, and education and business polices, amongst others (Horowitz 2000: 8). This discrimination on the basis of ethnicity poses a number of challenges to the internal cohesion of the state as well as to citizens' relationships with one another (Diamond 1988). This line of argument is discussed in more detail in chapters 5 and 6, below. In view of all these, one cannot but say that ethnicity does matter. This said, there is however a need for some clarification. Although ethnicity, as has just been mentioned, does matter, it should not be seen as an independent variable. As rightly observed by Brubaker and Laitin (1998: 425), and later by Cordell and Wolf (2010), there is hardly any ethnic action, individual or collective, that is entirely reducible to the fact of ethnicity itself, even if the latter generally forms part of the explanation. This clarification is important for this project, to avoid focusing entirely on ethnicity, as if it is all that matters. Other variables, such as interests and manipulative elites, are equally relevant in explaining political affairs. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with this issue in greater detail. In the work of Mugabane (1969), Sklar (1967), Diamond (1988) and more recently Chabal and Daloz (2000) the role of ethnic elites in the construction and instrumentalisation of ethnicity for personal gain is well explained. This leaves us with the conclusion that ethnicity matters, but alongside other variables, in explaining a wide range of political issues, of which violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Having explained some of the relevant key concepts, and considered in what ways ethnicity may be said to matter, this chapter next examines theories of violent ethnic mobilisation. The aim is to assess the extent to which each offers an adequate explanation, in order to determine which theory, or which combination of theories, is best suited for the purpose of this research.

Competing Theories of Violent Ethnic Mobilisation

Following Olzak (1983), this thesis defines violent ethnic mobilisation as the process through which groups organise around some features of ethnicity such as custom, myths of common origin, skin colour and language, amongst others, in *violent* pursuit of collective ends. Before

proceeding, it might be helpful to mention that Olzak's original definition does not include the word 'violent'. I have added it. Olzak's original intention, it seems, was simply to define mobilisation in a generic way and there is nothing wrong with that. However, for research whose primary interest is to investigate the subject of *violent* ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the inclusion of the qualifying adjective 'violent' will help, even if marginally, to focus the definition on the current context. It is for this reason that the qualifying adjective 'violent' has been purposively inserted in the definition. Furthermore, although the term 'mobilisation' has also been defined by other scholars such as Johnson (2007) and Vermeersch (2010; 2011), amongst others, analysis of their definitions shows that they do not differ in any substantial way from that provided earlier by Olzak. I have therefore chosen to retain the above-stated definition, which draws almost entirely on Olzak's.

Having provided a quick definition of what is meant by mobilisation, in what follows, I will outline prevalent academic theories of violent ethnic mobilisation which include, but are not limited to the following: ancient hatred, manipulative elites, economic inequality, rational choice and instrumentalism, amongst others. These are discussed below, under the categories of the schools of thought they fall into. The core argument presented here is that ideas championed by the primordialist and modernist schools regarding the causes of ethnic violence tend to be mutually polarizing, rather than complementary. But for an adequate understanding and explanation of the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation, a theory that combines the meaningful logics or elements of existing traditions is needed. It is for this reason that this project adopts Ethnosymbolism - a theoretical approach that combines the logics of hitherto existing traditions to proffer a more adequate and comprehensive theory of ethnic violence. The following section is devoted to the appraisal of competing theories of violent ethnic mobilisation with the aim of selecting the one, or the combination, most appropriate for this research investigation.

Primordialism (Ancient Hatred)

The earliest theoretical attempt to explain the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation is the ancient hatred doctrine which holds that ethnic groups fight one another due to some firmly established, fixed and inflexible differences based on biological descent or ancestry (Varshney 2001). Thematically, this theory belongs to the primordialist school of thought.

The overarching claim of primordialism is that ethnic identity is congenitally acquired. It is a given over which an individual has no power as it is supposedly based on the fact of nativity and not on social construction. According to the logic of this claim, ethnicity, naturally and inevitably, links people of the same ancestry, separating them and their way of life from those of different ancestral stock and the reason for this centripetal tendency is attributed to nature itself and not to social engineering. As Geertz (1963: 109-10) observes, one is bound to and cares for one's kinsmen, one's neighbours, one's fellow believers as a result not merely of interest, or incurred obligation, but in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself. It is therefore argued that this natural tendency to stick with and care for those of the same blood relationship (ingroup) inevitably generates the awareness of another group or groups (outgroup) to which it stands in opposition, and with which it clashes, as these groups pursue or try to protect their overlapping interests. In the final analyses, the basic submission here is that ethnic differentiation as well conflicts that arise as a result, are natural, inevitable and ineradicable (Geertz 1963).

Before the second half of the 20th century, Primordialism was the dominant intellectual approach for studying the subject of ethnicity and its related conflicts. Although Shills (1957) and Geertz (1963) are among the prominent and easily identified scholars of the primordialist tradition, elements of this trend of thought are equally present in the writings of earlier scholars such as Hobbes (1651), Rousseau(1762) and Sieyes(1789). The primordial notion of the naturalness and ineradicability of ethnic conflict is for instance captured in *Leviathan* where Hobbes (1651) inductively locates the roots of politically salient violence, ethnic or otherwise, in the very nature of man. For him, human beings (whether as individuals or as groups) are selfish by nature, and always clashing with one another over overlapping selfish interests. Where violent conflicts have not escalated, it is simply because of the existence of a strong state which represses the natural human inclination to violence, Hobbes argues. Undoubtedly, the propriety, or not, of Hobbes' opinion could be still further explored; the important thing at this stage is merely to point out how pervasive and dominant was the naturalistic or primordial view of conflict prior to the second half of 20th century. Although neither Hobbes (1651), Rousseau (1762) nor Sieyes (1789) conspicuously identified as primordialist, the primordialist notion that favours the formation of political blocs on the basis of natural or ancestral contiguity is particularly expressed in the writings of the last two. Both advocated for humanity's return to the original or primordial state of nature as a way of fleeing urban corruption and recovering its original innocence and tranquillity, which by implication entails the eradication of violent

conflicts and the restoration of socio-political calm. In his work *Le Tiers Etat*, Sieyes (1789) expressly mentioned that nations (ethnic groups) are natural and primordial communities, which obviously precludes the idea of nations or ethnic groups as socially constructed realities as the modernist scholars hold. By 1790, this primordialist idea was already being used to justify both the absolute sovereignty of the people's will and of the inward-looking crude and extreme right-wing form of nationalism that set ethno-nationalist groups against one another in Europe (Smith 2001).

Similarly, the earliest scholarly approach to the study of interethnic relations and conflicts in Africa before the advent of modern historical research methods in the last six decades was predominantly primordialist. It is perhaps quite normal to anticipate this, as the crop of scholars writing on the subject at the time were European anthropologists who were heavily influenced by the prevalent primordialist tradition of their time (Berman 1998; Ukiwo 2005). Ethnic groups or 'tribes', that is, the presumed basic political units in Africa were, according to the colonial anthropologists, formed on the basis of natural ancestral descent. They claimed that it is that natural and irrational instinctual pull that impels one to care more for blood relations that causes Africans to violently mobilise along ethnic lines and not on the basis of some rational calculus (Berman 1998; Thomson 2010; 2016). The implication of this baseless claim is that ethnic group rivalry in Africa (Nigeria and its Niger Delta region inclusive) are ancient, immemorial, and naturally part of who Africans are. Media or popular reports on inter-ethnic confrontations in Africa are therefore supposed to be self-explanatory. No further reason is required, for it is quite natural and normal to expect that ethnic groups will clash from time to time. This project is not satisfied with this over simplistic, biased and unfounded speculation that is easily refuted by simply making reference to more reliable, empirically-based modernist historical research, which reveals that struggles over interests were always a key factor in premodern African interethnic violent confrontations, just like anywhere else in the world (Berman 1998; Nnoli 1980; 2003). The limitations of primordialism and its ancient hatred doctrine is manifold. Below I shall outline and briefly discuss some of the primary issues for which they are criticised and derided. The first concerns the fallacy of consanguinity or biological common ancestry. The second has to do with the assumed fixity and ineradicability of ethnic conflict. The third relates to the claim that ethnic passion and solidarity originate from natural instincts, rather than from rational calculus or social construction.

First, primordialism gives the impression that members of an ethnic group are traceable, even if diverse and years apart, to some specific biological ancestry. However, what we currently

know about ethnic groups does not support this. Many ethnic groups contain people whose population is far too large and diverse to be traced to single ancestry (Johnson 2005; Chandra 2006; Gabbert 2006). In the US and in the UK for instance, the word ethnicity is used to refer to immigrants, such as blacks, even if they have, for instance, originated from Jamaica, Nigeria, Haiti or the Caribbean. Even if all of them did originate from a single ancestral stock, there is at the moment no way of establishing that. It remains a baseless myth. For this reason, it is therefore better to avoid affirming with certainty, as primordialists tend to do, that which is yet to be verified. Anderson (1983; 1991; 2006) quite understands this enigma and has chosen to refer to an ethnic group as an imagined community. It is perhaps also for a similar reason that Smith and Hutchinson (1996), whose definition of ethnicity we are using, refer to the idea of common ancestral ethnic descent as a myth.

The second issue with primordialism, which relates to the eternal presence or ineradicability of ethnic violence, can also be refuted and rejected for its inability to offer reasonable explanations, either for the dormancy and variety of ethnic sentiments and conflicts over time, or for the complete disappearance of many ethnic identities and conflicts within most modern and advanced societies (Bayart 1993: 51). A large number of inter-ethnic relations has been, and continues to be, conducted peacefully in many ethnically plural modern societies. Even when *ethnies* harboured grievances against one another, governments and political leaders have in many instances managed the situations in a very pacific way (Esman 2004). So, ethnic violence as understood in this thesis is not ineradicable. Logically speaking, violence presupposes the existence, previously, of peace.

Another problem with primordialism relates to its claim that peoples' desire for solidarity with their ethnic group (especially when a collective ethnic action, such as violent mobilisation is deemed necessary) has its basis in that natural human instinct which impels them to unite with and care more for those of a blood relationship, as opposed to those who are not, rather than in interests or rational calculus. This claim has long been heavily criticised for neglecting the economic and political interests that are often associated with ethnic sentiments, practices and conflicts (Glazer and Moynihan 1963; Greenberg 1980). Some critics have argued that ethnic feelings in fact arise out of specific historic-social conditions; and that primordial sentiments have to be elicited by some sort of experience, and are therefore tied rationally to circumstances, which means that they could change as the circumstances to which they are tied change (Kiwuwa 2012:11). The conclusion of the World Bank funded investigation carried out by Collier and Hoeffler (2000), also toes a similar line of argument. It affirms that greed

(intended and potentially realizable interests), rather than grievance (mere passion), has more explanatory power in accounting for why people mobilise violently along ethnic lines. Even if Collier and Hoeffler's research has been criticised for making a universal claim based on limited empirical investigation, it is still widely acknowledged as credible research corroborated by common experiences in ethnic violence scenarios.

Modernist Theories (Instrumentalism and Constructivism)

With the increased use of more reliable modernist social science research methods during the 1960s, the focus of academic debates shifted towards questioning the relationship between ethnicity and modernisation. The dilemma during this period was to determine whether ethnicity, and its related conflicts were primordial, immemorial and even altruistic (MacLaughlin 2001:5); or socially constructed and functional. Modernist scholars conclude that ethnic identities, boundaries, and ethnic conflicts, are neither natural, fixed nor unalterable realities as the primordialists hold. They are rather malleable, and quite frequently readapt to socio-political and economic pressures. This view is well articulated by Billig (1995) who states that ethnicity and ethnic violence are constructed realities of modern times that serve some preconceived beneficial ends of ethnic elites. Implicit in Billig's assertion are two distinct elements: constructivist and instrumentalist features, corresponding to the following schools of thought: Constructivism and Instrumentalism respectively.

Instrumentalism, as the name implies, is the view that ethnicity is an instrument or a strategic tool for the attaining benefits of some sort (Duran 1974: 43; Lonsdale 1992; Kiwuwa 2012: 12). According to Glazer and Moynihan (1979), ethnicity is not just a mix of affective sentiments, but like class and nationality, is a means of political mobilisation for advancing personal and group interests. The influential empirical research carried out by Collier and Hoeffler (2001) goes in the same direction. Its findings suggest that people mobilise to violence along ethnic lines due more to the economic benefits accruable than from sheer grievance, and that countries with lootable natural resources run more risk of ethnic violence than those that have none.

Instrumentalism is closely linked with Constructivism. Following Chandra (2004), this thesis argues that it is simply a question of which of the two should be given greater emphasis. The former (instrumentalism) highlights the utility of ethnic conflict more, while the latter

(constructivism) lays greater emphasis on ethnicity and ethnic conflicts as actively and humanly constructed realities. But a reality so constructed, it should be noted, is not just for its own sake. It is always in view of some other ends. In this sense, there may be a case for subsuming instrumentalism under constructivism. This is what Chandra (2004) has done, even if some authors still keep the distinction, perhaps for the sake of increased clarity. In any case, a deduction from the foregoing shows that for both the constructivist and instrumentalist schools, ethnic conflicts are the outcome of rational human operations (construction) and are functional (Bates 1974; 1983; 1997; Hechter 1986; 1995; Fearon 1994; Chandra 2004).

Over the years, modernist scholars have, in an attempt to shed more light on the origins of violent ethnic mobilisation, come up with a number of competing theories. Some of these are considered below, beginning with economic inequality theory.

The economic inequality explanation for violent ethnic conflict, which is often associated with the work of Hechter (1975), holds that violent ethnic conflicts result from socio-economic inequalities existing between different ethnic blocs within an ethnically plural society. This unevenness, perceived or actual, generates grievances within the disadvantaged ethnic community, and when not properly managed spirals into violence. Some of the well-researched documents on the causes of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta make reference to a long-standing economic marginalisation of the region as the main driver of conflict in the area. But this claim does not explain why ethnic violence has not spiralled in other economically disadvantaged ethnic groups within the country. Nigeria has over 300 identifiable ethnic groups (Salawu 2010), most of which complain about being economically marginalised, yet, unlike the Niger Delta region, have not mobilised to ethnic violence despite their grievances. In view of this, this thesis assumes that there is more to the question of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region than can be adequately answered using the economic inequality argument. Hence the need for a more suitable theoretical framework for the research.

Manipulative elite theory represents another explanatory effort. This theory, which rightly belongs to the instrumentalist school of thought, holds that ethnic conflict is the outcome of elites' instrumentalisation and strategic manipulation of ethnicity for egoistic political and economic ends (Bates 1974; 1983; Hechter 1986; Chandra 2004). In fact, elites and ethnic entrepreneurs actively orchestrate violent ethnic conflict insofar as it is politically and economically rewarding for them (Brass 1997:26). That elites usually play significant manipulative and mobilisational roles in the emergence and exacerbation of ethnic conflicts,

especially for their own selfish interests, is not usually questioned among scholars. This, however, does not immediately explain why followers are drawn into the struggle if benefits flow only to the elites (Horowitz 1998). It might be suggested that followers are not aware that they are being manipulated. But again, this needs proof. Some have argued that it abnormal to expect rational adults to become part of extreme violent contestations, if they occasionally risk their own lives in doing so, without any particular objective or interest. For this reason, elite manipulation theory has been criticised for wrongly painting a picture of 'evil politicians and innocent masses' (Kakar 1996: 150) without taking into consideration the fact that individual participants in a conflict might also be doing so for some personal gain (Pandey 1992: 41). This theory is therefore not sufficient to explain the involvement of masses in the Niger Delta's violent mobilisation. A more comprehensive one is there needed.

Institutionalism is another dominant perspective on the origins of violent ethnic conflicts. This perspective holds that the form of administrative design used in the governance of a state is of paramount importance in explaining why some ethnically plural societies have conflicts and others do not (Varshney 2005). The administrative pattern suitable for governing non-ethnically divided societies might prove ineffective in administering those that are. Arbitrary replication of institutional forms, Berman (1998) suggests, is one of the reasons why ethnic conflict is still prevalent in Africa (of which Nigeria is part). Most African countries, he claims, have not been able to successfully change colonial administrative structures which, far from being democratic, were veritable instruments for the economic exploitation of the colonized countries. But then, Nigeria as a country has tried different institutional designs, starting from Westminster parliamentary style, to the American presidential system of governance that it currently practices. Not to mention the fact that it has also been ruled with the iron fists of military dictators. Through all these regimes, the Niger Delta region has remained a zone of conflict. Not even the despotic military rulers succeeded fully in eradicating regional violent conflict. Currently, there are agitations by the Niger Deltans for an institutional design that allows each region to control their own resources. This, they believe, would bring an end to the conflict. Experts are however not fully convinced that this would be the case unless corruption and clientelism are stamped out - as these misdemeanours are capable of rendering even the most suitable institutional design ineffective. Faulty Institutional design is therefore not entirely to blame for the eruption and persistence of violent ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta. Even if the institutional design were faulty, it could still be reformed without necessarily leading to the persistent violence that has for decades rocked this region.

Another explanatory perspective on the origins of ethnic violence is the 'security dilemma' theory. This view, associated with Posen (1993), is a version of rational choice theory. Generally, the latter holds that people mobilise to ethnic violence or war by calculating its profitableness. The assumption that profit maximisation is the reason for group's action fills inter-ethnic relations with suspicions, insecurity and fear that arise from not being certain about the real motive behind an ethnic group's action. Psychologically, this uncertainty forces each group to become vigilant, readying itself to ward off any unprecedented form of oppression, exploitation or assault. Sometimes, this need to remain vigilant may necessitate some pre-emptive attacks. Such mutual hyper-alertness and obsessive reinforcement of ethnic security measures heightens interethnic tensions and eventually, the spiralling of ethnic violence (de Figueiredo and Weingast 1999; Fearon 1994; Hechter 1995; Lake and Rothchild 1996; Posen 1993). The Nigerian government's threat to use military action to enforce tranquillity and order in the Niger Delta region has contributed to the increase in the number of sophisticated ammunitions hoarded by the Niger Delta militants. They do this in order to stand a good chance of resisting the federal forces should they insist on using repressive military might as a means of resolving the conflict. Although it could reasonably be contended that the security dilemma theory offers some useful explanations of the escalation and persistence violent ethnic mobilisation in the region under review, it also has flaws. Its critiques have for instance argued that feelings of insecurity or fear are not sufficient to trigger an organised and sustained violent confrontation; not even the most extreme form of fear is capable of so doing. For violence to ensue, the strategic, organisational and motivational roles of elites are required. The public needs to be convinced, through strategic, provocative and purposive elite discourses, that their lives as a people are in real danger of being completely obliterated, and that war, or an organised military-like collective ethnic response, is therefore necessary as a means to withstand external aggressors (Kaufman 2001; 2006). Because of its limitations, this theory has not been considered a sufficient theoretical base for this research, even if its partial relevance is still acknowledged.

The Insufficiency of Existing Theories and the Adequacy of Ethnosymbolism

One thing that comes out clearly in the evaluation of the explanatory powers of the theories of violent ethnic conflict discussed above is that each of them has something useful to offer, but none of them - neither primordialism (ancient hatred doctrine), nor the theoretical strands of

constructivism and instrumentalism, have been found to offer substantive or entirely sufficient and comprehensive accounts of why violent ethnic mobilisation occurs. What is lacking, and therefore required, is a theory that combines the explanatory logics of all these theories in order to offer a more robust and comprehensively adequate explanation for why violent ethnic confrontations occur and persist. This thesis agrees with Kaufman (2001; 2006), that ethnic conflict is a complex phenomenon and requires a more dynamic and a more encompassing theoretical approach.

Enquiries into the *locus* of our research: the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, reveal the existence of a similar conundrum; for the theories hitherto employed in explaining and resolving the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the region are relevant but individually isolating and insufficient. Scholars, international NGOs and other agencies charged with the task of formulating policies on violent ethnic conflict resolution in Africa are, to a very large extent, culpable for the subsistence of this problem; the policy guidelines and directions they provide draw extensively on the modernist tradition (constructivism and instrumentalism) and quite frequently neglect, just like the tradition they draw on, the importance of primordial ethnic myths in the generation of violent ethnic conflict. In the rare instances where this has been taken into consideration, it is usually brief and in passing. For instance, in their analyses of the causes of violent conflicts in Africa, the DFID (2001) and the United Nations Commission for Africa (2015) briefly recognise the role of ethnic myths and symbols in violent ethnic mobilisation. However, of all the conflict management recommendations they put forward, none stipulates how the contribution of the ethnic myth-symbol complex to conflict generation may be effectively addressed. Their proposed solutions addressed other factors such as economic inequality, manipulation by political elites', etc.; but no effort is made to address the ethnic myth-symbol complexes that provoke and justify collective ethnic violence. This again reveals the modernist tendency to neglect or ignore the ethnic dimension of ethnic conflict. Commenting on the reality of ethnic conflict in Nigeria and also in the Niger Delta, Nnoli (1978; 2003) opines that mobilisation to ethnic violence in the region is the outcome of carefully constructed socio-political and economic frameworks that favour the North (majority) ethnic group more than the South-South (minority) ethnic groups, in whose territory Nigerian oil is located. His approach is largely modernist. For Osaghae (1998), Douglas (2003), Watts et al (2004), and Osaghae (2007), among others, poverty is to blame for the escalation of conflict in the region. The poverty alluded to here is supposedly the outcome of bad institutional design, which is itself a product of intentional human construction. Their approach

is equally modernist, and does not sufficiently take into consideration the possible roles of hostile ethnic myth and symbols in provoking ethnic violence in the region. In the final analysis, all these boil down to the basic belief that violent ethnic conflict and mobilisation in the Niger Delta of Nigeria are humanly constructed and can be deconstructed and resolved if the political will is present. This has been the dominant approach to analysing and resolving the problem of ethnic conflict in Nigeria, and for a long time has also been the basis for the formulation of government policies aimed at eradicating violent conflict in the Niger Delta region.

Years have passed but these policies have not fully succeeded in yielding the anticipated positive results. There is therefore a need for a re-examination of the modernist theoretical framework that has for long been the dominant intellectual approach inspiring the policy efforts that aim to solve the problem of ethnic violence in Nigeria, especially in its Niger Delta region. A key hypothesis of this project is that inadequate theories lead logically to the formulation of inadequate policies, which, quite naturally, lead to inadequate solutions, and hence the persistence of ethnic violence in the region. To forestall this, our research project earnestly seeks to formulate a theory that meaningfully combines the explanatory logics of existing theories in order to fashion a more comprehensive and adequate theory that informs policies that can successfully resolve the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region. The name of this adequate theory, as has already been mentioned in the introduction above, is Ethnosymbolism – the variant developed by Stuart Kaufman. A discussion of ethnosymbolism and what it consists of, follows.

Ethnosymbolism

In the 1980s, the modernist view of ethnic conflict has been challenged and criticised as being too lopsided by a moderate position called Ethnosymbolism. This was initially developed by Young (1976), but became increasingly associated with the works of Smith (1980, 1991), Connor (1994) and more recently also with Kaufman (2001; 2006).

Ethnosymbolism as an intellectual position which contends that ethnic violence is neither 'wholly' an exclusive outcome of the intentional and strategic fabrications of elites in the modern era, as the instrumentalist and constructivist scholars both suggest; nor is it purely naturalistic and unconstructed as the primordialists hold. Its argument is that the mutually

exclusive binaries presented by primordialism and modernism do not adequately capture the complex dynamics involved in ethnic conflict. For ethnosymbolists, ethnic conflicts, while being a social construction of modern times, rely on a pre-existing texture of myths, memories, values and symbols (Conversi 1995: 73-4; Ozkirimli 2010: 168). In other words, there is always something ancient, immemorial, and surviving about modern ethnicity and ethnic conflicts that predates modernist constructivism. Modern nations, but also ethnicities, are founded on what Anthony Smith (2009) refers to as 'ethnic core' which provides a people with symbolic resources such as memories, myths, traditions and values that provide an ethnic community or nation with a sense of identity and direction (Larin 2010). To discover this, one needs to go further back and look at the pre-modern socio-cultural antecedents and contexts that have furnished the materials used in the creation of modern ethnicities and nations (Smith 2000: 69-70; 2009). But modernist scholars such as Gellner (1996) ignore the fact that the past furnishes modernism with material for the construction of modern ethnicity and conflict. Modernism does not take into consideration the place of passion and ethnic myth in the spiralling and persistence of ethnic violence.

When it comes to arousing the sentiments of an ethnic or national population for collective action, violent or otherwise, ethnic myths and symbols play a very important role. Ethnic myths and symbols communicate narratives about peoples' collective descent, customs and traditions, heroic exploits, and provide a system whereby an ethnic group's contemporary attitudes and actions are ordered and validated (Calhoun, 2002; Darvill, 2009; Baldick, 2015; Vivanco, 2018). As Smith (1984) notes, myth plays an important role in nourishing the sense of ethnic identity, solidarity and in mobilising ethnic communities for political action. When chauvinist elites stir a national or ethnic population to violence, they tap into some pre-existing popular myths. These are not wholly constructed in the present, otherwise they would be totally alien to the people, and *ipso facto* lose their ability to emotionally sensitise them to collective action. Ethnic entrepreneurs rather reinterpret and readapt already-existing myths for the attainment of some beneficial preconceived objectives. Modern ethnic conflicts are therefore, in this sense, partially ancient, and not entirely modern. This is the critical contribution that ethnosymbolism makes relative to modernism. Smith (1996:362) argues, and this thesis shares his view, that ethno-symbolism does more than other approaches to explain the power of myths, values and collective memories in generating emotional widespread popular support and participation in collective ethnic action. This opinion is again re-echoed in Kaufman (2001), and in Cordell

and Wolff (2010), who affirm that Ethnosymbolism is one way of achieving a more robust, reliable and encompassing synthetic theory of violent ethnic mobilisation.

Regrettably however, literature on violent ethnic mobilisation in Nigeria still lacks a work that creatively synthesizes and theoretically organises the logics of existing theories of ethnic violence in order to produce a more robust theoretical base for understanding and explaining violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta. This is the gap that the current research project aspires to fill through the ethnosymbolic theoretical framework it adopts. Approaches hitherto employed by scholars and policy makers in Nigeria have not fully succeeded in delivering the anticipated positive outcomes. This, I argue, is due largely to the fact that the theoretical approaches they have employed tend to be mutually isolating rather than complementary. This weakens their theoretical potencies and further renders them insufficient. The ethnosymbolic approach proposed here is more robust, comprehensive, and indeed more promising with regard to shaping policies that can more effectively address the issue of violent ethnic mobilisation in the region in question.

Ethnosymbolism as an approach has been criticised for underestimating the fluidity and malleability of ethnic identity, and the fact that the forces of nationalism can fundamentally transform pre-existing ethnic identities and bestow new significance on cultural inheritance (Ozkirimir 2000: 187; Kedourie 1994: 141). To counter this view, it is helpful to recognise that the transformation of pre-existing ethnic material is neither arbitrary nor occurs in a vacuum. It is always constrained by the cultural contexts in which it occurs. The new must somehow fuse with the old before gradually transforming it. Otherwise, people would hardly become emotionally attached to some novel, historically and culturally deracinated and forcefully imposed ethnic identities. And if this passionate ethnic attachment is missing, people would hardly be mobilised along ethnic lines in the context of violence (Gurr and Harff 2003). Therefore, an adequate account of violent ethnic mobilisation in modern society ought to take into consideration *la longue durée*, that is, 'a time dimension of many centuries' of the formation of ethnic identity (Armstrong 1982:4). This is exactly what ethnosymbolism does.

In addition to situating and pursuing this research within the ethnosymbolic paradigm, I would like to quickly mention that I have found the theory developed by Kaufman (2001) very useful as an action plan (analytical framework). His theory speaks to the current research project in a most eloquent way. Given this, it is worth offering a bird's eye view of what his theory entails.

Kaufman's Theory, an Overview

In 2001 Stuart Kaufman published an influential work: *Modern Hatreds*. In line with the basic tenets of ethnosymbolism, the work develops a theory of ethnic war or violence that combines a wide range of disparate theoretical perspectives on ethnic conflict to explain why ethnic wars and violence occur, but also why for the most part they do not.

Compelling neuroscientific findings, which according to Kaufman (2001; 2006) form the basis of his theory, reveal that emotions, rather than rational calculations, arouse people to action. It helps them set priorities and disposes them to act (Long and Brecke 2003: 24). When ordinary people are presented with competing values, they usually made their choices on the basis of emotions (Edelman 1971). Myths and symbols are very powerful at evoking such emotions. Symbols enshrine and represent (via objects) popular myths that give meaning to actions or events. In the presence of these emotionally laden objects, historical facts become redundant; and it is the potency of the symbols that readily provides the basis and justification for extreme collective ethnic actions (Kaufman 2001; Evans-Kent 2001). The claim that Kaufman makes here about symbols is not merely an abstract adumbration. The way this plays out in history can easily be confirmed. Nations and ethnic groups have been provoked to violence simply by tampering with or denigrating symbols that represented their collective identity. In the Niger Delta, land and its inherent resource are instances of such ethnic symbols. The series of ethno-religious violence that spiralled in many countries following the perceived symbolic denigration of Prophet Mohammed by a Norwegian cartoonist in 2010 is a good case in point. In 2012, violence broke out in Afghanistan after US soldiers burnt the Holy Koran, a religious symbol of the collective identity of a people. In the south-western part of Nigeria, the felling of the statue of Awolowo in 2008 caused some violent stirrings amongst the vast majority of Yoruba for whom Awolowo was an icon of ethnic unity. A host of other instances that confirm the power of ethnic symbols in arousing ethnic passion and actions, violent or otherwise, abound in world history. The foregoing demonstrates that myth-symbol complexes are important elements in the spiralling of ethnic and national violence; yet this aspect has been for a long time neglected by most modernist scholars.

For ethnic war or violence to evolve, the following three conditions are, according to Kaufman, required: **myth-symbol complexes, a clash of interests,** and **manipulative elites**. Ethnic myth-symbol complexes are tools used by manipulative elites to mobilise an ethnic population, but they only work when there is some conflict of interests, as well as some mythically based

feelings of hostility that can be tapped-into via ethnic symbols (Kaufman 2001:13). The elites interpreted these myth-symbol complexes to arouse strong feelings of hate, anger, insecurity and fear, convincing the public that their collective peril was imminent if they did not rise up in arms to defend themselves and actively ward off their fatally dangerous ethnic opponents. Although symbols are constructed, the meaning they enshrine and mediate derives from pre-existing popular myths which are then interpreted to excite and mobilise people to act violently. In this way, Kaufman combines the relevant explanatory logics of the 'ancient and immemorial origins' of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts, instrumentalism (Duran 1974; Lonsdale 1992; Bates 1974, 1983; Hechter 1986; Brass: 1997) and constructivism (Young 1993; Sollors 1989; Nagel 1994, 1996; Blauner 1972) in order to fashion a more robust theoretical explanation for violent ethnic mobilisation, namely the 'Symbolic politics' doctrine, which, according to him, offers a more satisfactory explanation for the complex ethnic atrocities that have occurred in the Balkans.

Although Kaufman's theory was developed with a view to understanding and explaining the motivation for collective violent ethnic actions in the Balkans, it still remains a relevant doctrine that can be applied meaningfully in the current research, which investigates why violent ethnic mobilisation has persisted in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Just as in Kaufman's research context, the theoretical inadequacy of the modernist theories hitherto employed by scholars to explain the origins and causes of violent ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta compels us to think of a more adequate and comprehensive alternative: the ethnosymbolic perspective that we now use.

This thesis is aware of the complex dynamics involved in the Niger Delta ethnic conflict, which the existing modernist literature lacks the power to explain. This project therefore represents an advance - for unlike existing academic work on the subject of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta, it is more encompassing, seeking to take into consideration the following elements: the emotionally laden **myth-symbol complexes** that may have been peddled to arouse hostile ethnic sentiments, the issue of the **interests** at stake in the regional imbroglio, and finally the **roles played by ethnic elites** in the mobilisation and persistence of ethnic violence in this region. In so doing, this thesis creatively combines the relevant logics of existing theories in order to produce a more theoretically comprehensive and adequate explanation for the spiralling and persistent regional violent situation it studies. Within the narrow academic niche of violent ethnic mobilisation in Nigeria in general, and of the Niger Delta region in particular, the ethnosymbolic approach that is proposed here is novel, and its

potentials are yet to be fully explored. I therefore anticipate that its introduction will be of great use in the future.

A More Critical Look at Kaufman's Theory of Ethnic Violence

Since 1995 at least, Stuart Kaufman has been among the leading thinkers on the subject of violent ethnic mobilisation. His major work of 2001, *Modern Hatred*, apart from winning the prestigious *Grawemeyer Award* for creative "Ideas Improving the World Order" in 2003, has also been widely extolled within academia for advancing the way we understand the causality and persistence of ethno-national violence. Chaim Kaufmann (2002) describes Kaufman's work as making a 'serious original contribution' to knowledge – a contribution which according to Evans-Kent(2001), is clearly seen in the author's ingenuity, not only in explaining the mechanism by which ethnic tensions metamorphose into full-scale violent conflicts, but also in creatively synthesising the relevant logics of hitherto-existing theoretical explanations of ethnic violence to produce a more robust and comprehensive alternative.

Despite this recognition, Kaufman's ethnosymbolic theory has been subject to a number criticisms, some of which may be found in the works of Chaim Kaufmann (2002), Young (2002), Tang (2015) and, James and Mohammadian (2017) amongst others. These criticisms, it is worth mentioning from the outset, are usually very minor and do not, in general, raise serious questions about the core validity of Kaufman's ethnosymbolic theory. Concerns raised usually articulate around issues of minor omission that are easily fixed, and do not violate the integrity and validity of his theory. Let us, for instance, consider the criticism levelled against Kaufman(2001) by Chaim Kaufman (2002). The latter criticises him for not setting operational limits to some of the key concepts employed in his work. Chaim obviously expected that Kaufman (2001) should have defined, for example, exactly what may be classified as 'ethnic symbols'. What sort of myths, beliefs or facts are they? This, for him, is very important because what Stuart Kaufman (2001) refers to as 'symbolic grievances' may quite easily be understood by another scholar as grievances over material stuff - real material grievances. There is therefore some sense of ambiguity, Chaim Kaufman (2002) claims, in the way Kaufman employs the concept – an observation that Janos (2002) also makes in his evaluation of Kaufman's work. In awareness of Kaufman's failure to provide operational definitions of some of the concepts he employs, I therefore agree with the aforementioned scholars that these

should have been provided in order to eliminate ambiguities and facilitate comprehension. Having said that, I would like to quickly add that Kaufman's theory, despite all that, is not incomprehensible. One caveat is that any individual working with Kaufman's key texts should be aware of these minor definitional weaknesses, and be ready to make up for them while reading or working with them. This is exactly what this project has done by providing operational definitions (especially in Chapters 1, 4 and 5) of some key concepts such as interest, ethnicity, and manipulative elites, among others, which have been employed, but not sufficiently defined by Kaufman.

Further criticisms come from Young (2002) and Chaim Kaufmann (2002), who both describe Kaufman's *Modern Hatred* as an ambitious piece that seeks to formulate a universalizable theory of extreme ethnic violence – one that is applicable in any part of the world, whereas nearly all his data and case-studies derive from one region, the Balkans. It is therefore problematic, Chaim Kaufmann (2002) suggests, to formulate a universalisable theory on the basis of the limited data obtained from a very small region of the world - the Balkans. Hence, the need for Kaufman to expand his case study/data collection bases. Young's and Chaim Kaufmann's observations are accurate, and this thesis agrees with them that Kaufman would have benefited more from increasing and diversifying his case studies and data collection bases. This, without doubt, would have strengthened his arguments. Having said that, it would be equally helpful to observe that this criticism is not a very fundamental one. For it does not in any way nullify the credibility and validity of the 'symbolic politics theory' proposed by Kaufman (2001). His theory remains valid – pending the discovery of other cases of ethno-national violence that counter or invalidate it. So, while there are some valid criticisms of Kaufman's work, it is important to note that these are often quite minor, and do not alter the core validity of his theory of ethnic violence. Considered from this angle, Kaufman's work, it seems to me, resembles any other good literature within the domain of the social sciences – for there is hardly any academic publication within this domain that cannot be criticised, even if only slightly. As Popper (1963) and Garcia (2006) among others opine, falsifiability is a normal characteristic of good scientific production. Otherwise, it may well be regarded as dogma – a mere article of faith. What should therefore matter *viz-a-vis* social science theories is not whether possible criticisms of them exist, but rather, how serious the criticisms are. In the case of Kaufman, none has been able to come up with criticisms that convincingly invalidate the core of his theory.

The usefulness of Kaufman's ethnosymbolic theory in furthering the way we think about/analyse ethno-national violence is not in doubt; and many scholars within the discipline of ethnic violence such as Evans-Kent(2001), Young (2002), Janos (2002), Ayres (2016), attest to this, in some ways, as well. They, for instance, agree with Kaufman that existing, individually isolating, classical modernist instrumentalist and constructivist doctrines of ethnic violence do not adequately account for why ethnic violence occurs and persists; and that what is required is a theory that that creatively combines the relevant logics of all these in order to provide a more comprehensive and robust explanation of the causality of ethnic violence. Similarly, none of these critics has been able to convincingly argue that Kaufman's ethnosymbolic theory, which obviously builds on Edelman (1971)'s theory of political mobilisation, is wrong in upholding the contributory roles of ethnic myth-symbol complexes in the generation, spiralling and persistence of politically salient ethno-national violence. This central element of Kaufman's theory has not been convincingly refuted till date. On the contrary, it is actually becoming increasingly accepted within academia.

Since 2001 when Kaufman first published *Modern Hatreds*, the author has published further works, of which *Nationalist Passion* (2015) and 'War as Symbolic Politics' (2019) which re-echo and strengthen, rather than fundamentally alter or contradict his ethnosymbolic theoretical stance on the contributory role of ethnicity (*ethnic myth-symbol complexes*) in the generation and persistence of extreme ethnic violence. Ethnosymbolism, especially the Kaufmanian version of it, is still a current and valid way of examining and resolving the problem of politically salient violent ethnic mobilisation around the globe.

Theoretical Relevance of Kaufman in the Niger Delta

A number of questions that a critical mind is likely to raise regarding the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theoretical framework that guides the current research project might look a bit like the following: what is the relevance of Kaufman context of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta? Is there anything new in the theory that did not already exist in the literature on violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta? If yes, what is it? If not, what use is his theory in the region? This section aims to address such concerns by rapidly reviewing some of the key literature on the subject of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria.

First, I begin by acknowledging that the context within which Kaufman's ethnosymbolic theory evolved is similar to that of the Niger Delta - a world challenged not only by the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation, but also a world where scholarly efforts to address the crisis lopsidedly draws on the valid, but insufficient, classical modernist theories of constructivism and instrumentalism. The constraints that these theories of ethnic violence impose on conflict resolution efforts, due largely to their insufficiency, are well-highlighted in ethnosymbolic literature. Scholars of the ethnosymbolic tradition contend that any theory of ethnic violence capable of robustly accounting for why violent ethnic mobilisations occur and persist, and of providing a comprehensive and effective conflict resolution plan, ought to be of the type that goes beyond the rational calculus of ethnic violence and incorporates the often-ignored roles of ethnicity (ethnic myth-symbol complexes) in the orchestration and persistence of violent ethnic conflict. Ethnosymbolism, Kaufman argues, is that robust theory. This theoretical perspective is, quite unfortunately, not yet being fully explored and utilised by major scholars with an interest in the Niger Delta conflict. In the few instances where there are indications of the likely existence of the notion of ethnosymbolism (as a theory) in the literature about this geographical area, the idea is usually presented only sporadically and not properly teased out theoretically – a deficiency that this project aspires to make up for.

Agitations in the ***contemporary*** Niger Delta region started taking a violent turn in the 1990s (Ikelegbe, 2005). Earlier information available on the issue during this period came predominantly from journalists whose principal aim was to render an 'objective' account of the Niger Delta turmoil as it occurred, rather than delve into the 'hermeneutics' of the regional conflict. It was not until a few years later that proper academic reflections on the regional violence started to emerge. Osaghae (1995) is among the earlier scholars to have written about the causes of Niger Delta violence in the 1990s. In his widely disseminated article: 'The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of Nigerian State', Osaghae identifies environmental degradation, and the socio-economic and political marginalisation of the Ogoni people by the majority ethnic groups as the major causes of the Ogoni violent uprising, in which the indigenes violently demanded that these injustices be addressed. Osaghae's work is rich in its presentation of the historical facts of this violent conflict. What is however unclear is the theory with which his investigation worked. Although he did not clarify this question, his work seems to have drawn to some extent from the 'greed versus grievance theory' of ethnic violence, but even then, he neither sufficiently discussed nor critically engaged with the theory. Furthermore, there are also indications in the article that both the elites, as well as ethnicity,

may have played some roles in the generation and persistence of this regional conflict, but these were, again, not theoretically articulated or critically engaged with. In general, although it is impressive in terms of its presentation of historical facts, Osaghae's work is not theoretically well-informed – a weakness that this thesis, guided by Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theory, aspires to make up for.

Ogbogbo (2005), a bit like Osaghae, carefully presents what some scholars have come to recognise as an impressive historical account of the Niger Delta turmoil. While Osaghae (1995) concentrated on the Ogoni people, Ogbogbo (2005) aimed to produce a more ambitious account of the phenomenon of violent conflict across the entire Niger Delta region – covering both the ancient and contemporary phases of the regional turmoil. An important difference between these writers is that while Osaghae (1995) did not make explicit the framework within which his research was conducted, Ogbogbo (2005) is clear that his investigation is historical. Viewed from that angle, Ogbogbo's work does, to a very laudable extent, fulfil its objectives as a piece of historical research. That notwithstanding, when it comes to a more systematic, and theoretically illuminated, analyses of the roles of ethnicity (ethnic myth-symbol complexes), and manipulative elites in the spiralling and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the region, Ogbogbo's work leaves some gap which therefore needs to be supplemented – a task that this thesis also endeavours to accomplish also.

Other scholars worth considering are those who are in the habit of simply enumerating, rather than theoretically debating, what they believe to be the causal factors of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta. Although many such scholars exist, the work of Salawu seems to be quite representative of this tendency. In Salawu (2010) one encounters an effort to outline the causal factors that drive violent mobilisations of an ethnic and religious sort, not only in the Niger Delta, but across Nigeria. Among the major factors he identifies are socio-economic discrimination and marginalisation, unemployment, ethnicity, poverty, and the failure of leadership. Although there is some evidence that these factors may have contributed to the spiralling of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta, Salawu (2010) does not offer theoretically informed arguments to back up his claim. Much more than just providing us with a list of possible causal factors, and furnishing us a fairly good chronological list of ethno-religious conflicts across Nigeria, one would normally anticipate that a serious academic publication on the topic of ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria, including the Niger Delta region, should be theoretically oriented and able to engage with the complex dynamics of

patron-client networks, and ethnic myth-symbol complexes that contribute to the spiralling and persistence of the crisis. This thesis also seeks to make up for this absence.

Later writers on the topic of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta, unlike some of the earlier ones examined above, now make genuine efforts, it seems, to correct what may be described as the tendency to neglect, or ignore the relevance of theoretically informed research investigations in the Niger Delta. In the works of Watts (2004,2007), Obi (2009; 2010; 2011), Ikelegbe (2005), Omeje (2005), Ifeka (2006), Idemudia (2006; 2009), Ako (2011), Ukiwo (2011) Ahonsi (2011), Anugwom (2007;2014), Adunbi (2016), Iwilade (2017), Nwokolo (2018), Babatunde (2019) and Courson & Odijie (2020) among others, one encounters a more rigorous crop of scholars who are not just sufficiently familiar with relevant theories of ethnic violence, but who also deploy them to examine and offer solutions to the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta. This *modus operandi* represents an advance – for it enables scholars to provide a more systematic and reasonably critical evaluation of the complex dynamics of the context of the Niger Delta violence. This said, it is nonetheless worth noting that being grounded in theories does not make scholarly opinions immune from flaws. For this reason, I shall, in what follows, examine the works of the aforementioned scholars a bit more closely in order to identify their merits and demerits, and indicate a way forward.

Obi (2009; 2010) contends that the crisis is rooted in the inequitable distribution of the oil wealth deriving from the Niger Delta which disadvantages the people of the area, causing them to make violent demands for total control of both their region and their resources. He understands this problem from the perspective of the economic inequality theory of ethnic violence. Although Obi's observation is valid, seeking to explain the Niger Delta conflict solely from economic inequality or resource deprivation theories of ethnic violence is quite constraining. Anyone familiar with the context of the violence in the Niger Delta will agree that it is a very complex zone of conflict whose drivers are much more than just economics, and therefore requires a more complex conflict analysis and approach to resolution. Obi (2014) would later take cognisance of this fact in his criticism of the resource curse theory of ethnic violence, a theory he compellingly rejects as an adequate framework for assessing the Niger Delta crisis. There, he suggests that a good alternative should be a theory that addresses the complex issues involved in the Niger Delta crisis. Although this thesis affirms and upholds this opinion, it is however still a bit startling that Obi (2014) does not go further to develop, or provide details of the theoretical alternative he proposes. Whatever the case, the Kaufmanian

ethnosymbolic theory used in this research makes up for what is lacking in Obi (2009; 2010; 2014). It provides more details about the nature of the ethnosymbolic theory adopted for the research.

Ikelegbe (2005) locates the problem of violence in the Niger Delta in a number of factors, including contestation over perceived injustice over the distribution of resources, ethnicity, the weakness of the Nigerian state and its failure restructure the country, the vested interest of elites, and the grievances of both youth and the ethnic population over socio-economic and political marginalisation. In this piece, Ikelegbe is able to make a good case for why these factors are important triggers of conflict in the region. What is however lacking is his inability to go beyond merely outlining factors and theoretically furnish us with a mechanism that explains how these factors or elements interact with one another in a complex way to generate and cause violence to continue to persist. Addressing a complex scenario of violence such as that of the Niger Delta requires an elaborately developed theoretical framework that should guide investigation and analyses – because theoretical frameworks assist researchers to systematically evaluate previous research efforts, discover what is lacking, and how what is missing could be supplied. Merely outlining some supposedly causal factors of the Niger Delta conflict does not accomplish this objective. An overarching theory, or some combination of theories, is needed; and this is what the ethnosymbolism used in this research aims to accomplish.

Omeje (2005) suggests that oil wealth, as well as the patrimonial accumulation of it, is the main driver of violence in the Niger Delta. This opinion has features of both the resource curse theory, and the greed versus grievance economic theory of ethnic violence. One of the weaknesses of such theories is seen in their inability to explore and affirm the power of ethnicity (ethnic myth-symbol complexes) in the generation, spiralling and persistence of ethnic violence. Like these theories, Omeje (2005)'s opinion on the causal relevance of oil and patrimonialism in the Niger Delta conflict is accurate, however his work ought to have engaged more with the role or contribution of ethnicity (ethnic myth symbol complexes) in the generation and persistence of the Niger Delta conflict. Again, Omeje does not explain the mechanism of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta; that is, how the conflict actually occurs – an issue that Kaufman's theory helps us deal with more effectively.

Ukiwo (2007) makes a case against the use of the resource curse theory, rejecting its validity for examining the phenomenon of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta, as some scholars

have tried to do. Drawing on available historical evidence on the origins of the Niger Delta conflict, Ukiwo is able to compellingly demonstrate that insurgency in the Niger Delta:

> *is the consequence of longstanding experiences of political and social-cultural marginalization. Militant groups emerged as a result of the failure of the state and oil companies to respond to peaceful protests in previous decades.*

Ukiwo's position on this is hardly ever reasonably controverted – for nearly every writer on the phenomenon of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta agrees that years of socio-political and economic marginalisation of the region are among the reasons for sustained violence occurring in the region. Despite this, Ukiwo (2007) did not explain how this violent mobilisation actually occurs – its mechanism. Is it elite-led, or mass led? Are there other necessary factors, such as ethnic myth-symbol complexes, that may have contributed to the regional crisis? He did not explore these issues further. Yet, a robust understanding of the complex issues involved in the region ought to address these questions.

Nwokolo (2018:1)'s analyses of his in-dept interviews with stakeholders in the Niger Delta peace process reveals the impact of elite corruption/manipulation and patron-clientelism on the regional conflict. A major consequence of this is that the

> *post-conflict peace-building mechanisms of amnesty and DDR programs designed to build peace through youth empowerment have been captured and corrupted by power elites. In their do-or-die struggles for power positions and oil revenues, the elites have criminalized some ex-militants by mobilizing them as thugs, kidnappers, and oil thieves, thus posing a huge threat to sustainable peace and democratic consolidation in the region. The study indicts political desperation, systemic corruption, poor policy execution, and weak public institutions for the impunity of the elites and criminalized youths. It recommends value re-orientation and strengthening of public institutions to mitigate corruption and social violence among leaders and followers alike.*

Nwokolo's analyses and recommendations are reasonable, but incomplete. Anyone familiar with the context of violence in the Niger Delta will agree that ethnicity is quite frequently implicated in various claims being made in the region's conflict. However, Nwokolo neither sufficiently engages with this aspect in his work, nor provided an analyses of how popular ethnic myths/symbols complexes may have contributed to violent mobilisations within the region. Unlike his work, this research project, which relies on Kaufman's ethnosymbolic

theory, accounts for the roles of corrupt and manipulative elites in regional conflict, as well as the underlying impetus of competing egoistic or sectional interests and the impact of ethnicity in the whole crisis. It thus provides us with a more comprehensive knowledge of the Niger Delta problem, as well as insights into how to contain it.

Watts (2004; 2007) is another scholar who provides us with a rich and intellectually compelling analyses of the Niger Delta violence. His primary objective is to demonstrate, beyond Collier (2000), and other resource curse theorists of ethnic violence, that the Niger Delta's oil is much more than just a lootable resource. It is, on the contrary, a complex (Watts speaks about the 'oil complex') in the sense that it enables the creation of different forms of 'governable spaces' or regimes which sometimes stand in direct contradiction to one another. In the end, Watts concludes that although the Niger Delta's oil may be a curse, at least in the sense suggested by the resource curse theorists, its turbulent history, as well as its ability to generate conflicts can only be properly understood by paying attention to the complex character of the oil itself, and also to the actions of those corporate institutions and states that focus on this oil for wealth accumulation. A careful reading of Watts (2004; 2007) reveals his understanding and recognition of the complex issues involved in the crisis. Like both Kaufman's theory and the current thesis, he acknowledges the contributory roles of competing interests in oil wealth, and of manipulative and corrupt elites, and ethnicity, in the regional crisis. However, what Watts has not done is develop a theory that explains the mechanism of this regional turbulence; that is, how these factors, especially ethnic myth-symbols, interact with one another to generate and sustain violent mobilisation. This is the point at which this thesis goes beyond Watts. It not only explains the mechanism of ethnic violence in the region, but also makes a case for why ethnosymbolism is a superior framework for examining and finding solutions to the problem of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta. These aspects are missing in Watts' work.

Idemudia (2006) is one of the very few scholars who have not only acknowledged the complexity of the Niger Delta crisis, but who have also tried to propose theories appropriate for understanding and resolving the regional crisis. He proposes what he describes as an 'integrated explanation' of the various factors responsible for the Niger Delta conflict. Idemudia's use of the phrase 'integrated explanation' acknowledges that there are many drivers of violent conflict in the Niger Delta. Hence, the need for a theory that integrates the logics of these drivers. The integrated approach suggested here by Idemudia looks a bit like ethnosymbolism in terms of its intention to combine the relevant logics of existing explanations

of the regional conflict. The problem is that Idemudia neither develops the theory further, nor provides details of what it consists in. This thesis, unlike Idemudia's (2006), not only identifies and names this theory, but also provides details about its nature, as well as why it is most suitable for examining and finding solutions to the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta. Unlike this thesis and Kaufman's theory (on which it draws), Idemudia (2006) did not explore the roles of ethnic myth-symbol complexes in violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta – an aspect often neglected by many theories of ethnic violence in this region.

Among the handful of thinkers to have seriously considered and explored the role of ethnic myth-symbol complexes in the Niger Delta conflict are Ifeka (2006), Anugwom (2011), and Adunbi (2015). Their work is considered important because they focus, a bit more systematically, on the often-ignored contribution of ethnicity, particularly the so-called ethnic myth-symbol complexes, in the violent mobilisation of youth. These myths/symbols range from ethnic narratives to objects of religious belief and myths of collective ancestry, among others. These – the so-called 'non-rationals', as opposed to just rational calculus alone, have also been found by these scholars to play some mobilisational roles in the regional crisis under study.

For instance, Ifeka (2006) shows how numerous ethnic militia organisations in Nigeria, constituted primarily of youths, draw on pre-existing ethnic myths for violent mobilisation. The emphasis here is on the potency of ethnic myths/symbols as mobilisational tools in Nigeria, rather than on the pervasive rational choice explanations alone. Anugwom (2011) and Courson and Odijie (2020) develop this idea a bit further in their work, but with a tailored focus on the issue of youth mobilisation in the Niger Delta. Both present some interesting reflections on how the *Egbesu* deity of the Ijaw ethnic group has played some roles in the youths' violent mobilisation against the unjust activities of both the Federal government of Nigeria and the Multinational oil companies in the region. Among the Ijaw ethnic group of the Niger Delta, *Egbesu* is a divine being who is traditionally believed to offer protection to fighters of just wars. According to Omeje (2017: 8), *Egbesu* is a spiritual instrument that vaccinates fighters against bullets. Contemporary Ijaw ethnic militants are said to tap into this ethnic myth to draw courage, strength and motivation for their fight against the injustices of the state and the oil companies. While Courson and Odijie (2020: 2) still entertained some modicum of doubt regarding the total veracity and reliability of 'Egbesu just war ethics' and assumptions, Anugwom (2011) is unwavering in her conviction of the role that the *Egbesu* deity plays in

emboldening and empowering the youths for the wars they fight in the Niger Delta. In her words

> *While other scholars may perceive the invocation of the occult represented by the Egbesu deity of the Ijaw ethnic group in the region as representing the normative pattern and religious beliefs of the people, I see its crucial role in emboldening, empowering and engendering the struggle of the youth as being facilitated by the marginalisation of the region within the Nigerian federal system. (Anugwom 2011: 6)*

It is interesting to observe, especially in the light of the foregoing, that claims about the causal contribution of ethnic myth-symbol complexes in mobilising an ethnic population, or a portion of it, to violence were to some reasonable degree already present in the Niger Delta literature. Before now, Ifeka (2006), Anugwom (2011), and Adunbi (2015) amongst others have all, in some ways, reached this conclusion. However, it is not clear whether these scholars had access to Kaufman's earlier works. Perhaps they did, but there is not sufficient evidence to unequivocally demonstrate that this happened, especially as they did not reference Kaufman in their work. Whatever is the case, the idea that ethnic myth/symbols contribute to violent mobilisation already existed in the writings of some contemporary writers on the subject of violent ethnic mobilisation in Nigeria and in the Niger Delta prior the publication of Kaufman's major work on the topic. The pertinent question now is: if this idea already existed in literature on the Niger Delta, then of what use is Kaufman's theory in the region – for he seems to be proposing what in some way is already present?

Regarding the causal roles of ethnic myths/symbols in violent mobilisation, there are a few differences between Kaufman's work and those of Ifeka, Anugwom, and Adunbi. These scholars seem to have focused almost entirely on youths. Their pre-occupation has been with showing that the Niger Delta militia groups or youths tap into pre-existing ethnic mythologies to draw inspiration and courage for collective violent action. The problem with this lopsided focus is that it causes them to lose sight of the far more important issue of how elites (and not just the youths) also tapped into this source (ethnic myth/symbols) to stir ethnic populations to violence. Although Anugwom (2011) did very briefly mention that elites occasionally instrumentalise ethnic myths/symbols to incite ethnic violence, she did not develop this idea further, not even to explain the mechanism of this violent mobilisation. Unlike the theories outlined above, Kaufman's theory not only provides a more detailed discourse on how both youths (mass-led mobilisation) and elites tap into ethnic myth-symbol complexes for violent

mobilisation, but also goes further to formulate a coherent theory that explains the mechanism of such violent mobilisations – how they actually occur. Drawing on Kaufman's theory, this thesis discusses (in both chapters 5 and 6), how ethnic myths/symbols causally contribute to the generation and persistence of violent conflict in the Niger Delta – a task which, according to Iwilade (2016), Adunbi (2015)'s work failed to accomplish, despite his claim that it would.

The above assessment shows that Kaufman's perspective on the role of ethnicity (ethnic myths/symbols) in conflict generation is more comprehensive – a good reason to favour it over others. Again, of all the literature reviewed up to now, only Kaufman's work provides details of how to creatively combine the relevant logic of existing explanations of ethnic violence in order to construct a more comprehensive, unified, coherent and robust general theory of violent ethnic mobilisation in Niger Delta scholarship - exactly what this thesis intends to achieve by putting forward the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theoretical framework as a superior alternative.

A General observation

A remarkable feature of all the scholarly perspectives presented above is that they are all relevant in a number of ways – for, on an individual basis, even if isolated, they each tell us something factually correct about the causality of violent mobilisations taking place in the Niger Delta. The problem is that none of them has been able to theoretically organise the logic of existing explanations to capture the complex issues involved in the regional violence under investigation. It is at this point that this thesis inserts itself and advances the area study literature at bit further, thanks to the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolism that it upholds as a more adequate framework for analysing and finding solutions to the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region. The potency of Kaufmanian ethnosymbolism lies not only in its ability to creatively and effectively combine the relevant logic of existing explanations of ethno-national violence in order to proffer a more comprehensive and robust framework for the analysis and resolution of ethnic violence (that violence in which ethnic groups are implicated), but also in its ability to theoretically articulate its mechanism – that is, the process of its generation, occurrence, and persistence. This, without doubt, is different from the 'integrated approach' proposed by scholars such as Idemudia (2006; 2009). While the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic framework articulates and explains the mechanism of ethnic violence, that is, how these factors interact with one another in a complex way to generate and sustain ethnic

violence, the integrated approach fails to go beyond acknowledging) and occasionally enumerating) that the drivers of the Niger Delta conflict are 'many', not 'one'. So, when it comes to explaining the mechanism of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta, thanks to the ethnosymbolic theory of ethnic violence developed by Kaufman, this thesis is ahead of an integrated approach. It meets all the objectives of the integrated approach and goes beyond it, offering a theoretically informed explanation of the complex mechanism of ethnic violence in the region. The conclusion of this thesis, drawing on Kaufman's ethnosymbolic theory, is that, in pursuit of private or sectional interest, manipulative/corrupt elites tap into pre-existing ethnic myth-symbol complexes to generate extreme fears (security dilemma) that impel the people to mobilise for, and justify collective violent action (see also the footnote).[1]

With ethnosymbolism one would nearly always be led to ask the right kinds of questions whenever ethnic populations, like those in the Niger Delta, are implicated in violent conflicts: what are the competing interests at stake in the violent conflict? What roles have the corrupt or manipulative elites played in the orchestration, spiralling and persistence of the conflict? In what ways might ethnicity, particularly ethnic myth-symbol complexes, have contributed in the brewing and escalation of the turmoil? In fact, there is hardly violence in the Niger Delta that cannot be explained with reference either to the roles of interest (socio-economic, political,

[1] Kaufman (as well as this thesis) is not unaware of the fact of youth involvement and resistance in violent ethnic conflict scenarios. In fact, he clearly takes this into consideration in his *Modern Hatred* (2001) when he writes about mass-led violent mobilisation, as opposed to elite-led ones. However, if Kaufman has decided not to seriously consider including youth-led violent mobilisation (unlike the manipulative elites) as a necessary factor for the persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation, it is mainly because he perceives it as subservient to, and largely dependent on the actions and inactions of corrupt and manipulative elites. When closely examined, it would quickly become evident how the so-called violent youth mobilisation or resistance is often a reaction to the unjust attitudes, actions, or inactions of corrupt or manipulative elites. Let us briefly consider the flip-side of the coin and imagine for a while that the Nigerian and the Niger Delta elites (rulers, leader, and influential others) were neither corrupt nor manipulative; that is, that they properly exercised their functions as 'just' leaders and men of honour, the Niger Delta youths would not have had any cause to agitate or engage in any well-structured, organised and sustained violent mobilisation as is currently the case in the region. If they tried, they would not only have had no moral justification for their violent activities, but the elites also have the necessary state *apparatus* at their disposal to contain, quell and disperse them. But this, unfortunately, is not the state of affairs in Niger Delta. On the contrary, what can be seen in the region is a scenario where manipulative and corrupt elites fuel the regional crisis through unjust and illegitimate actions and inactions; and these provide the youths with the moral grounds and impetus for violent resistance and agitation. So, if Kaufman did not consider it necessary to include mass-led mobilisation as part of the necessary conditions for extreme violent ethnic conflict, it is mainly because its viability is dependent on the attitudes, actions, and inactions of the elites. Injustice breeds rebellion. The youth resistance or rebellion in the Niger Delta is a natural consequence of the 'unjustness' of corrupt and manipulative elites both in Nigeria and in the region, rather than, strictly speaking, one of the necessary causalities of the regional crisis as some would like to have us believe. It is equally for this reason that the current thesis concentrates more on the examination of the roles of the elites than the violent activities of the youths. For it is in discussing the negative and provocative actions/inactions of the elites in the region that one better understands the place of youth resistance in the Niger Delta crisis.

or otherwise), or elites (manipulative, egoistic, corrupt or otherwise) and ethnicity (myth symbol complexes, solidarity, identity etc), or a combination of these. This is why Kaufman's ethnosymbolism is a very fitting framework for examining and resolving the problem of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta. It is comprehensive, rigorous, robust, and simultaneously concise and complex in its character.

All these notwithstanding, I do however recognise that Kaufman probably does not know much about the context of violence in the Niger Delta and certainly has not written anything about it. But this does not mean that his theory is irrelevant *vis-à-vis* the region. While the theoretical framework he provides may be usefully applied in the Niger Delta (as has been demonstrated in both the theoretical and empirical parts of this research) details about the context of the regional crisis under review have been supplied by other scholars, as well as by the elites interviewed during the course of my fieldwork - not by Kaufman himself. These sources complement each other well to provide the foreground and guide needed by this research project to effectively pursue and attain its objectives.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology for the thesis. I begin with brief information about how I gained access to the field. This is immediately followed by a description of the research design chosen for the project, as well as some justification for the choice. After this comes a brief insight into the nature of my interviewees, as well as why this category of individuals were preferred to other possible informants on the topic being investigated. Following this is information about the analysis of the data. Some of the major challenges encountered during the research, ethical and otherwise, are also discussed, with the emphasis on how they have been successfully managed. The chapter concludes with a brief note on how the often-tricky decision about 'when and how to exit the field' was eventually made.

Accessing the Field

My empirical fieldwork research in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria commenced on the 5th of April 2017 and ended on the 25th of August 2017 – a period that spanned just over three and half months.

Approximately 5 months prior to my departure for the fieldwork, I spent a great deal of time trying to locate my possible respondents. Internet sources such as LinkedIn, Google search, Twitter and Facebook were very useful in identifying some of them. This process of identification was not random; the prospective interviewees needed to meet certain minimum criteria such as being among the influential figures of the Niger Delta region (elites); being familiar with the subject of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region, and finally, to have made or be making some contribution to the wider conversation on the Niger Delta's conflict mitigation and resolution.

With the list of the possible interviewees finally drawn up, I began making phone calls and sending out pre-interview request letters and e-mails to these prospective interviewees. Fortunately, most of them responded positively, and their consent was secured well ahead of time. The bulk of the interviews took place in two major cities of the Niger Delta region - Port Harcourt and Yenagoa. Port Harcourt is the capital city of Rivers state, while Yenagoa is the capital city of Bayelsa state. These two states are very notorious with regard to the highly

advanced and sophisticated *modus operandi* of their violent militia organisations. So, when it comes to investigating the subject of violent ethnic mobilisation in the region, these two cities are very important zones for data collection. Apart from my personal efforts throughout the entire data collection process, it is worth mentioning that my gatekeeper, a resident of Port Harcourt city, also contributed in no small measure to identifying and facilitating my access to some of the respondents. He is familiar with the terrain, and was very helpful in enabling me to get around the cities more easily.

Shortly before my work formally started in the region, I felt the need to remind the gatekeeper once again of the purpose of the research project, as well as its core guiding ethical principles, among which were *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of data. Eventually, I was successful in getting him to agree, in accordance with these core principles, that neither the data obtained, nor the identity of the respondents would ever be disclosed to any third party. For the safety of the respondents, Berg (2007) and Bryman (2009) advise that the confidentiality and anonymity of data and respondents must be prioritised and taken very seriously. These established, the fieldwork research in the Niger Delta region commenced as planned.

Research Design

The primary goal of the fieldwork was to obtain some original data on why violent ethnic mobilisation has persisted in the Niger Delta region despite government efforts to eradicate it. To attain this, a qualitative *case study* research design was chosen as an appropriate method.

Robert Yin (2014: 16) defines a case study as 'an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used'. From Yin's definition, one learns that in the real social world, the demarcation between a phenomenon (a case) and context is not always clear. A researcher may therefore wish to embark on a case study investigation in order to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon in its real-life social context (Yin and Davis 2007). The same could be applied to my research situation. The issue of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta is a real-life incident. However, what is unclear is why it has persisted, and continues to persist despite a series of government efforts to eradicate it. Scholars and policy makers have come to a variety of conclusions on the issue. This variation confirms, just as captured in the above definition, that

the demarcation between phenomenon and context is, in the case of Niger Delta, blurry and therefore needs further clarification; and this is exactly the task that this project aims at accomplishing through its chosen research methods.

Because this research was interested in penetrating the façade of existing facts on ethnic violence in the region, raising pertinent questions aimed at uncovering meanings and motifs behind events, there is good reason to believe that the qualitative case study design employed was appropriate and capable of fulfilling the research aspirations. For as Tellis (1997) observes, a qualitative case study design is appropriate for answering the 'why' and 'how' questions in a research process. It goes beyond mere quantitative data in order to understand behavioural conditions from the point of view of those being researched.

While the research design was still at its developmental stage, an academic peer suggested, during a private conversation, that Ethnography or Participant observation could be an equally good means of collecting the needed data. Initially, these alternatives appeared to be quite promising. However, on closer examination, their inadequacies were revealed, and they were dropped for the following reasons: first, the research demands of both approaches (ethnography and participant observation) necessarily require the immersion of the researcher within his/her research milieu for a longer period of time in order to meaningfully investigate his/her subjects (Crang and Cook 2007; Gille and Riain 2002). This, by implication would entail my being physically present in the dangerous and volatile creeks of the Niger Delta where armed militants still actively operate. I was prepared to consider these options despite their inherent security challenges, but since there were no indications that using these approaches would certainly lead to the discovery of fresh data that would substantially differ from those reported in the ethnographic and participant observation investigations carried out on the subject by some other notable researchers such as Judith Asuni (2009), an American researcher who has spent decades researching the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation in the region, there was no compelling reason to use those research approaches. Credible ethnographic and participant observation research information on the issue already exists. Replication of the data is of no intellectual relevance, and certainly was not worth the security challenges involved. Secondly, when compared with the case study research design chosen for this project, there is no substantial evidence that ethnography and participant observation are more suitable or capable of obtaining relevant information on the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation. Given all this, I remained persuaded that the case study design chosen for the project was safe,

cost effective, and above all, very capable of meeting the research aims and objectives of this project.

Data Collection Method

As observed by Perecman and Curran (2006: 21), the case study approach is, more appropriately speaking, a research design rather than merely a data collection and analysis method, for it involves the utilisation of a wide range of data collection techniques including surveys, interviews, observation and questionnaires among others. Of all these techniques, the interview method (precisely, the semi structured qualitative interview method) was chosen as the primary means of eliciting original data from the field.

'Interviewing' may be defined as a conversation aimed at gathering information (Berg 2007: 89). The central idea conveyed by this definition is captured equally well in the works of Denzin (1978), Patton (2001) and (Babbie, 2003), among others.

Within the social sciences discipline, three broad categories of interview method are usually recognised: the structured, semi-structured and the unstructured variants. The structured interview method is quite rigid. It contains some pre-drafted sets of inflexible questions that are posed to the respondents in a predetermined order. The process is usually closed, permitting little or no initiative on the part of the interviewees. Its opposite is the unstructured interview method. Both methods may have their merits, but given the nature of my research and the sort of primary information I aimed to obtain, the semi-structured interview method was preferred for the following reason. Unlike the fixed and rigid nature of the structured interview method, the semi-structured alternative used in this project is more flexible. It outlines beforehand the specific questions to be posed, but also remains flexible enough to accommodate other related and relevant matters that may be raised during the interview process. For this investigation, which sought an in-depth understanding of why violent ethnic mobilisations occur and persist in the Niger Delta, there was a need for a data collection method that allowed the respondents to fully express their thoughts and sentiments, while not letting them veer off completely from the main issues being discussed. In this regard, the semi structured interview approach used in this research is very appropriate, and perhaps irreplaceable.

Research Location, Population and Triangulation

The Niger Delta region comprises six of the states of the Nigerian Federation, but they are not all the same when it comes to the issue of violent ethnic mobilisation in the region. Rivers and Bayelsa states are among the most notorious in this regard. Their militants are not only well organised and active, but also incredibly sophisticated in their manners of operation. So, for an in-depth study into the nature of violent mobilisation in the region, these two states could sufficiently serve as representatives for other states. Hence the reason for concentrating on these two states for the bulk of my interviews. My respondents were drawn from the official representatives of the people, namely: local traditional rulers and politicians (members of the state Houses of Assemblies) who served as proxies for the ethnic militants. These individuals belong to that section of a society that could be rightly referred to as the elite. The term 'elite' may be simply defined as a group of persons exercising a substantial amount of authority or influence within a larger group, especially on the account of their wealth, privileges or status. The definition provided here carefully and creatively integrates various senses in which the term has been defined both in English dictionaries, as well as in the works of some notable scholars in the field of qualitative research, such as Zuckerman (1972), Burt (1992), Smith (2006) Stephens (2007) and Harvey (2011). In the light of the above definition, and given the nature and status of my interviewees, it is pretty obvious that my interviews in the region are elite - for my respondents belong to the influential segment, though in varying degrees, of the Niger Delta society.

My data collection activities in the region occurred within a timeframe of approximately three and half months (05/04/2017 - 25/08/2017) of going back and forth between Bayelsa and Rivers state. Overall, I conducted a total number of 16 interviews. 9 of these took place in Yenagoa, the capital city of Bayelsa state, involving 3 traditional community rulers and 6 politicians (Members of Bayelsa State House of Assembly); while the other 7 interviews occurred in Port Harcourt, the capital city of Rivers state, and involved 3 traditional rulers and 4 politicians (Members of Rivers State House of Assembly). The number of these respondents would have been higher (up to 27) if not that some declined to participate at the very last moment. For that reason, I ended up with only 16 interviews.

Reflecting on the possible reasons for their abstention, I was led to acknowledge that the subject of my investigation was indeed a very sensitive one. A portion of my interview questions for instance sought to understand the contributions, if any, of the elites in the spiralling and

persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the region. In the pre-interview request letters sent to my respondents earlier, I had briefly stated the purpose and objective of the research. So, in some way, they already had some ideas about the sort of questions that might be posed. One could imagine that for them, such questions could be quite disconcerting, as they would require of the interviewees to provide information that could be potentially implicating. This, as I was later informed by another individual who knows the region quite well, might explain why some of them quietly declined being interviewed. Not even my promise of confidentiality and anonymity of data was able to make decide otherwise. This said, I am however satisfied and impressed with the richness of data obtained from those who complied.

The decision to interview the elites is based on the fact that they are generally well-informed on the subject of violent mobilisation in the region as well as its ramifications. As leaders, policy makers, lawmakers, government executives, contract and developmental projects' negotiators, alternative dispute resolution practitioners, and, to state the obvious, influential members of the society, the elites have access to privileged pieces of information that are not normally available to the general public. These are some of the reasons why it made sense to target them (elites) – for they are sources of 'seriously useful' information on the subject of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region. Eminent scholars such as Denzin (2009), Creswell *et al.* (2018), and Natow (2019) amongst others all agree on the uncommon ability of the elites to provide valuable information on pertinent issues from the perspective of power, authority and privilege.

This notwithstanding, I am aware that some might want to question why elites, rather than militants, were preferred as the main focus for data collection. Since the militants are the actual fighters in the Niger Delta's violent conflict, might it not have made more sense to focus on them, rather than the elites, as the main source of information? Again, wouldn't direct interviews with them have yielded more reliable information than those obtained from the elites? These were some of the questions raised by an inquisitive colleague during the preparatory phase of my fieldwork. This sort of questions are not entirely out of place – for it does seems reasonable to conjecture that those who actively engage in violent conflict or wars would normally understand, better than anyone else, why they are actually fighting. However, with regard to the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta, reality is a bit different. Although the militants have some knowledge about the *sitz im leben*, they are not as informed as the elites. It is therefore pertinent to understand the character and place of the militants in the zone of conflict under examination. We learn from Asuni (2009)'s ethnographic

research that Niger Delta militants are mostly young men who mobilise violently as a way to challenge, and possibly reverse the systemic injustices associated with oil exploitation, distribution and environmental degradation in their region. It is basically from this standpoint, albeit narrow, that the militants justify their involvement in violent mobilisation in the region. Valid information on this could be obtained from the militants themselves. But since this data, that is, all that could be known about the nature and the motifs of the Niger Delta militants, already exists in the public domain, this research did not consider it relevant to add to the already abundant information on the issue. Furthermore, there is also no guarantee, in the case of prioritising interviews with the militants, that they would be able to provide me with reliable information on what goes on in the secluded inner circles of elite interactions and conversations. On the other hand, however, elites have access to an incredibly large amount of information. There is basically no information that the militants could provide which could not be obtained from the elites. The elites control the institutional powers of the state, and their wealth and position generally allow them access to any information they might be interested in. There is also evidence that some of the elites actually control some of these militancy cartels and occasionally deploy them in pursuit of some personal objectives. In view of all these, it was reasonable to prioritise the path that was capable of providing a wider and deeper insight into the phenomenon of violent mobilisation being investigated in the Niger Delta. Hence the decision to focus on the elites as the main source of data collection. Even if some researchers might want to believe that more reliable information may have been obtained by directly interviewing the militants themselves, chances are high that a good number of militants may not be entirely aware of the complexity and ramifications of the regional conflict in which they are fighters. But unlike them, the official representatives of the people are usually very well-informed, better educated, and capable of articulating complex issues in a nuanced and intelligible manner. During my interviews, I was able to confirm, just as anticipated, that my respondents (the elites) were generally smart and articulate individuals. Although their opinions slightly differed on some issues, the responses they provided were, in general, cognitively meaningful.

Triangulation

Although I was very impressed with the highly detailed and rich data obtained by interviewing the elites, and there was no suspicion of deception or misinformation in the course of my

interactions with the respondents, it is always good practice to triangulate research data. This, to say the least, always strengthens data's credibility and reliability. The usefulness of triangulation in providing complementarity, clarity, richness, clarity, and robustness to research data is very well acknowledged amongst researchers (Faquhar *et al.* 2020; Morgan 2019; Noble et al. 2019). Triangulation is not just about verifying already existing data. Although this without doubt constitutes an important a part of its function, triangulation does a bit more. It is capable of providing fresh and thought-provoking insight into a piece of research, which in some way nudges a researcher into presenting a more critical, balanced and comprehensive account of the social reality being studied. This is the import one gets from a careful reading of Helen Noble. In her words 'triangulation is also an effort to help explore and explain complex human behaviour using a variety of methods to offer a more balanced explanation to readers' (Noble 2019:67). It was therefore in the light of these invaluable benefits of data triangulation that I decided to use a few other sources of primary data, not only to verify the elite interview data obtained during my fieldwork, but also to strengthen its credibility, reliability, and robustness. The materials used for triangulation (also known as supplementary sources) in this project were newspaper articles, television and newspaper interviews with technocrats, statesmen and ex-militants, official government documents, and relevant scholarly literature on the subject of violent ethnic mobilisation, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Twenty-three such materials were obtained and used.

Data Analysis

The semi-structured qualitative interviews yielded a fairly large amount of slightly unstructured text-based data. Making sense of the information obtained therefore required some data analysis, as well as tools by which this task would be accomplished. For this purpose, this project made use of a combination of manual text-analyses techniques and NVivo.

Data analysis, in general, including in this research, entails the systematic search and arrangement of interview transcripts and notes in order to identify relevant and significant patterns, discover meanings, and subsequently construct a logical chain of evidence (Wong 2008; Bogdan et al 1982; Patton 2002). According to Wong (2008), coding the data is the most important aspect of the complex process of data analysis. It involves segmenting raw data and assigning them to appropriate themes or categories (Dey 1993). Traditionally, and before the advent of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), researchers

performed the tasks of data coding and analysis manually. However, with technological advancements in the field, electronic methods of analysing data are now increasingly employed to assist researchers in their search for a more accurate and transparent picture of the data. A few such electronic methods are ATLAS.ti, NUD.IST, NVivo and Leximancer amongst others. From these, NVivo was selected for this project. The decision to choose NVivo was influenced by the fact that it is often recommended in the academic literature referred to. For qualitative text-based in-depth data analysis, NVivo is generally categorised among the best software available. This opinion is reflected in the work of some prominent scholars such as Auld *et al*. (2007), Welsh (2002), Sotiriadou *et al*. (2014), as well as, more conspicuously, in Stanford University's 'Social Science Data and Software Document' of 2012 which describes NVivo as: 'a comprehensive qualitative data analysis software package'. Below is a brief description of how the data were analysed.

First of all, the responses provided by the interviewees were transcribed, and then imported into NVivo where they were thematically sorted and coded in a way that facilitates identification, indexing and retrieval during analysis and interpretation. Thereafter, all synonymous terms and expressions were coded under a node, in a manner that did not alter their contextual meanings. For instance, the terms benefits, gains, advantages, profits were coded, and understood as 'interest'. Similarly, terms and expressions synonymous with, or, suggestive of 'ethnicity' such as ethnos, ethno, ethnic, etc, were coded as 'ethnicity'. The same was done with terms and expressions that are synonymous with 'manipulative elites'. This was the second step in the data analysis process.

Before proceeding, it is helpful to recall that 'interest', 'manipulative elites', and 'ethnicity' are the important variables specifically investigated by this research. The Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theoretical framework guiding the research outlines them as necessary conditions for the occurrence and persistence of ethnic violence. The researcher accepted Kaufman's view as valid. What however remained to be seen was what the interviewees had to say. Did they think that interest, manipulative elites, and ethnicity all played some roles in the spiralling and persistence of the Niger Delta violent conflict? It was in a bid to discover their opinions on these issues that I went to the field to interview them. The responses they provided on each of the variables were gathered under two broad categories or nodes: those who affirmed, and those who opposed. Those who, for instance, thought that **interest** has played some role in the spiralling of the regional conflict were grouped into an affirmative category, while those who responded negatively were, on the other hand, grouped into an

opposing node. This process was repeated with the responses obtained on the roles of the other variables (**manipulative elites** and **ethnicity)** in the onset and persistence of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta.

It was then fairly straightforward to see how many individuals (interviewees) supported or opposed which views, as well as the reasons they provided in support of their opinions. After this, all the responses were carefully analysed in the light of the extant academic literature on the subject of ethnic violence (including Kaufman's ethnosymbolism), as well as in the light of known historical incidents of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta in order to establish the credibility and validity, or not, of these interview positions. Details about how this analysis was done may be found in the empirical chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6) of this thesis.

Both NVivo, and manual textual analyses helped to better illuminate the data obtained from the interviews by revealing patterns and frequencies, and by facilitating the retrieval of the already coded and thematically sorted pieces of information.

Ethical Considerations

The need to conduct research in an ethically acceptable manner is not disputed. While all agree on this at least in principle, there have been instances, both famous and infamous, in which ethical research principles have been breached (Pittaway *et al*. 2010; Bryman, 2012:130).

But then the question of what constitutes ethically right or permissible conduct in research is still, to some extent, subject to a plurality of views. To eliminate ambiguities, or at least reduce them, the British Sociological Association (BSA 2002) and University of Bristol Ethics Committee (2015) provide official guidelines to assist researchers. I read these guidelines and familiarised myself with their prescriptions. In line with their dictates, I carefully ensured that I obtained my respondents' informed consent before the interviews. I also provided them with detailed information on the aims and objectives of the research, as well as about how the data would be used. All this was done in order to ensure that any form of deception was eliminated, and that participants' privacy was not invaded. In addition, the pieces of information provided were also recorded in a manner that anonymised the identity of the individual, even after official publication of the research output. This notwithstanding, there were two instances in which respondents wished their names revealed. The reason for this desire was not entirely clear to me. Perhaps they saw the interview process as a good opportunity to increase their

popularity among the people they governed, or as an avenue to overtly criticise their opponents. Whatever may have been the motif, I chose not to reveal their identities, especially as granting this wish might actually have exposed them to the wrath of those who held opposing views. Following Pittaway *et al*. (2010), I saw it as my responsibility to analyse my respondents' requests in order to ensure that fulfilling them would not inadvertently place them at some unforeseen risk. This does not translate into paternalism. I was simply abiding by the reasonable and well-thought out principles, based on which the University of Bristol granted approval for the research.

Another important element worthy of consideration concerns how this research project could benefit the individuals and communities researched. Pittaway *et al* (2010) presented a very cogent argument on the need for a piece of research to add value to the lives of those being researched, whenever possible. This, they argued, is a way of guarding against the reduction of the researched, that is, the human subjects participating in the research, to mere sources of data collection (simple objects used to accomplish research objectives). Because I share Pittaway's view, this research was designed, not only as a part of the wider effort to understand the dynamics of violent ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta, but also with a view to the restoration of the atmosphere of peace in which indigenes and residents of the region could flourish and prosper, both individually and collectively; for there is a link between violence and lack of human progress. So, far from being exploitative, the research actually aims to contribute to the common good of the communities in which it was carried out.

Other Challenges Encountered During the Fieldwork

The Validity and Reliability Question

One of the major challenges I encountered during the fieldwork relates to the question of validity and reliability. Like Watt (2007), I constantly asked myself the following question: how can I deal with my subjectivity in order that others may accept my research as credible? Beyond the current research context, it seems that this question is one of the major challenges confronting empirical researchers in the domain of the social sciences in general. In the natural sciences, whose object of investigation is fairly stable, measuring the 'objectivity', validity and reliability of a piece of research is relatively straightforward. But this issue becomes quite

convoluted when it comes to qualitatively researching the complex and constantly changing world of social phenomena. In social science qualitative research, objectivity in the real sense of the term is impossible; especially as social researchers, having been shaped by their social and educational contexts, have their preferences, biases and inclinations (Gadamer 1976). The same point applies to me as a researcher. My fieldwork has been conducted within the interpretivist, not positivist, tradition. This being the case, I cannot therefore claim to be entirely immune from the risk of my subjectivity interfering with the research process. That notwithstanding, I can still confidently say of my investigation that it is valid and reliable. This bold claim, quite naturally, brings up the question of the criteria for validity. By what means have I been able to come to the assertion that my research is valid and reliable? To clarify this, I would like to quickly state that I carefully evaluated my research processes against the background of the 'validity and reliability criteria' put forward by Guba (1985), and by Guba and Lincoln (1994). These include, but are not limited to the following: credibility, dependability and confirmability criteria. Although these yardsticks resemble the validity criteria used in the positivist tradition, they actually differ in a number of ways.

In qualitative research, the notion of credibility recognises the fact that people may interpret social realities in different ways. It is therefore the duty of the researcher to ensure that the interpretations reported reflect the opinions of the respondents (Bryman 2009: 132). During the interview process, I carefully took notes of the responses provided by the interviewees. At the end of every session, I always read back their replies to them so that they could confirm whether or not what had been scribbled down corresponded with what they had verbally expressed. Again, I always allowed my respondents the opportunity to make corrections whenever and wherever they felt their ideas had not been properly captured. All this was done because of my persuasion that the qualitative case study research method used should, as observed by Bryman (2009), describe and analyse social realities from the viewpoint of those being studied. At that material time, I was not particularly bothered about the issue of the universalisability, or not, of my findings. What mattered most for me was to ensure that the thoughts, social realities and details presented corresponded to the very social context and milieu from which they originated. This is the *thick description* that Geertz (1973) encouraged qualitative researchers to be more concerned about.

Having done all this, I am confident that any third party interested in testing the validity and reliability of this research would eventually return with the report that it is **credible** (that is, it represents interviewees' opinions on the issues investigated), **dependable** (that is, others could

confidently refer to it in making further analyses and recommendations) and **confirmable** (I have acted in good faith, and personal inclinations and biases have not unduly swayed the research processes and findings).

Respondents' Apprehension

Another challenge I encountered during the fieldwork is what could be described as the "respondents' apprehension". By this I mean some form of suspicion or fear entertained by my interviewees regarding the possible implications of the information they were asked to provide. In the pre-interview request letters sent to the interviewees, I clearly stated that whatever information provided to me during the interview would not only be anonymised, but also treated as confidential. I hoped that this assurance would assuage their apprehensions, but this was really not the case; for most of the respondents still remained somewhat apprehensive – taking extra care to ensure that all traces of their having met with me was completely erased. For instance, in Yenagoa, the capital city of Bayelsa State where I conducted some of the interviews, one member of the state's House of Assembly (an MP) that I interviewed declined to meet with me in his office as initially planned. He changed the venue just a couple of hours before the interview. The new venue was the frontage of a designated busy bank premises. Although we had previously not met each other, we were able to locate each other by phone calls. The scheduled interview eventually took place in my car at the designated spot. Similarly, another powerful traditional ruler who had earlier confirmed his availability for an interview with me declined at the last moment - just as I was already in his office. He met me, shook hands with me and welcomed me into his office, only to inform me that the interview would no longer take place. No genuine reason was given. Being closely observed by some of his heavily armed security guards, I dared not ask for further explanation on why our previously agreed interview schedule was suddenly cancelled. Furthermore, many of the interviewees who fulfilled their promise and granted me an audience did not allow me to record the interview. Only three consented to have the interview recorded, but on the condition that their identities be anonymised, and the information kept absolutely confidential. So, in most cases, I resorted to note-taking. Although this was not as effective as voice recording, I made sure that the essence of the information provided was correctly captured.

Eliciting information from such a sensitive population requires some level of familiarity with the art of qualitative interviewing; for simple errors in body language, tone, and manner of interrogation could easily affect the quality of responses provided by the respondents. It is for

this reason that Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) advised researchers on the need to develop strategies that are meaningful and relevant to their particular research context or population. Given the apprehensive and super sensitive nature of most of my respondents, my overall strategy was to be as frank as possible regarding the purpose of the interview, what the data collected would be used for, and to give an unwavering assurance of confidentiality and the anonymity of the data, as well as of my vision of the positive contribution of the research to peace processes in the region. These pieces of information, simple as they might appear, actually made the interview atmosphere less tense. Fairly relaxed, the respondents were then able to present their opinions as honestly as they could, and this made my interviews with them a very successful exercise.

Mobility

Getting around cities and villages was another difficult challenge that I had to face. Apart from the lack of other basic infrastructures in some of the villages, the road networks were in really bad shape, and frequently flooded after rainfalls. Because of this, mobility by means of public transport was generally problematic. To get around the situation, I had borrowed a car to use. Although this was very helpful, movement did not get massively easier due to some obvious difficulties with navigating the bad and water-logged roads in the area. On a few occasions, my car got trapped in muddy soil, frequently needing the help of generous passersby to help me push it back on to a dry surface. Although these experiences were quite discomforting, they did not come entirely as a surprise. The University of Bristol's ethics committee, relying on the information provided by the UK foreign office, had already forewarned me about such incidents. This warning predisposed me for the challenge, and I managed it very well. It had no negative impacts, neither on my research nor the results.

Security Issues and Strategies

Kidnapping and robbery are among the most disturbing security challenges that any researcher visiting the Niger Delta region should be mindful of. They are fairly common occurrences in the region. According to local news, there is usually a link between these crimes and poverty. Perpetrators of these nefarious acts often targeted those perceived to be financially well-off, or those from whom money and other valuables could be forcefully obtained without much

resistance. As a visiting researcher in possession of a high capacity laptop, mobile phones, digital camera, Dictaphones and money, the chances that I could become a victim were quite high. Being aware of this earlier helped me to figure out the best preventive measures to take, as follows:

First, I changed my dress code to conform with what was normal in the neighbourhoods I visited. So, I wore mostly T-shirts and shorts, except on those occasions when I had appointments with my interviewees. My dressing strategy helped avoid attracting unnecessary attention to myself, and avoid being placed at a risk of becoming the victim of either armed robbery or kidnapping.

The second strategy was to draw up a practical communication plan involving a trustworthy, responsible and responsive individual who served as my personal security contact person. Prior to every scheduled interview appointment, I provided this individual with very detailed information about my interview schedules, locations, respondents and the possible risks associated with the exercise. In addition to these, I also provided him with the University of Bristol contact details to be used in cases of emergency. Below is a brief description of my personal security plan and procedures.

Before departing for any scheduled appointment, I always texted my personal security contact person to provide information about the venue, the person to be interviewed and the estimated duration of the exercise. Each interview session usually lasted for about 40 minutes on the average. We had arranged that if for any reason he did not hear from me within 15 minutes after the estimated end time of each interview, he should try to contact me to ensure that no extraordinary challenge was being encountered. If he failed to reach me, and no response was received from me within an hour of repeated calls and text messages, then the local police authorities should be contacted, and other appropriate emergency response plans initiated; and this would have to include contacting and informing the University of Bristol authorities.

What I have described above is just the emergency action plan that we had in place. However, I am very glad that nothing horrible or overwhelming occurred, and that we did not have to resort to using these measures.

Leaving the Field

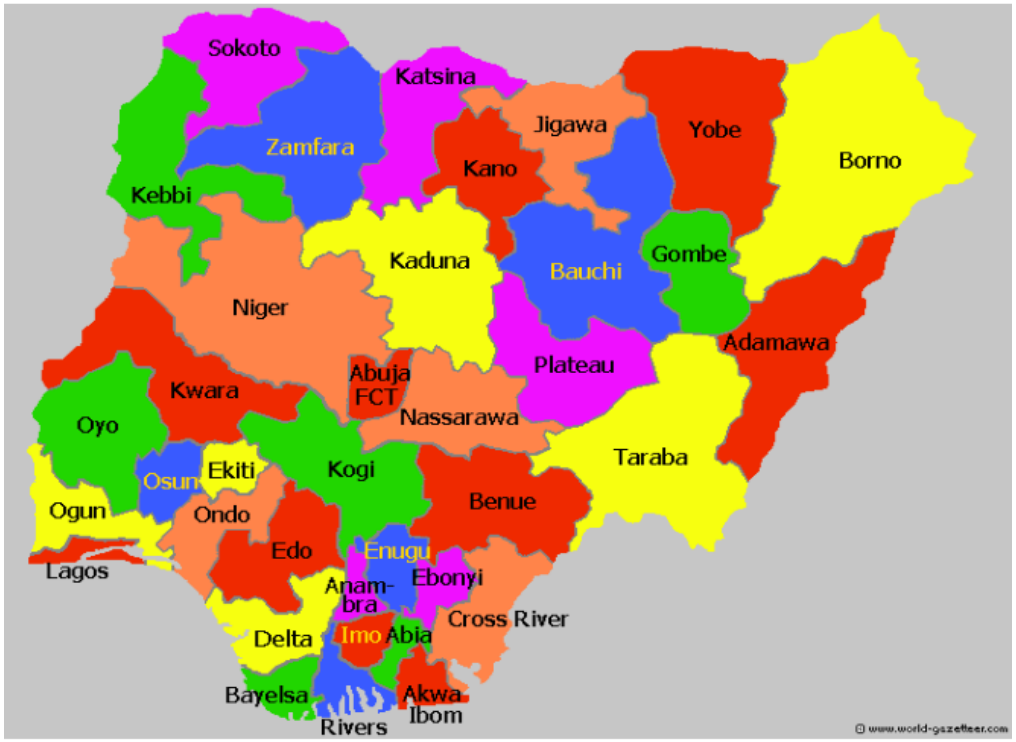
For many researchers, deciding on the appropriate time to leave the field is not an easy one. Should such a decision be based on the quantity or quality of data already collected? These were the sorts of questions that I reflexively raised during my fieldwork. However, the view of Baker and Edwards (2012: 15) on this was very helpful in finding a way forward. For them, there is "no reasonable answer, no magic number you can do and then you're out of danger. The only possible answer is to have enough interviews to say what you think is true and not to say things you don't have that number for".

In the current research context, the key factor in determining when to exit the field was the 'saturation point', rather than the quantity of data already amassed. In qualitative research, the saturation point, although quite difficult to define, is generally understood as the point when information gathered is believed by the researcher to be able to sufficiently answer the research questions (Bowen 2008; O'Reilly & Parker 2012; Walker 2012); and the ability to obtain additional fresh information has been reached (Guest *et al*., 2006). During my data collection, I knew I had attained the saturation point when pieces of information from my respondents started becoming repetitive, and I was obtaining no fresh insights on the subject of my investigation. That was the point at which I decided to conclude my investigation and exit the field. To justify this decision and affirm my confidence in the authenticity and credibility of the data collected, I further conducted a 'triangulation' exercise in which I interviewed a few other individuals.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENT ETHNIC MOBILISATION IN THE NIGER DELTA

Map of Nigeria



Source: world-gazetteer.com

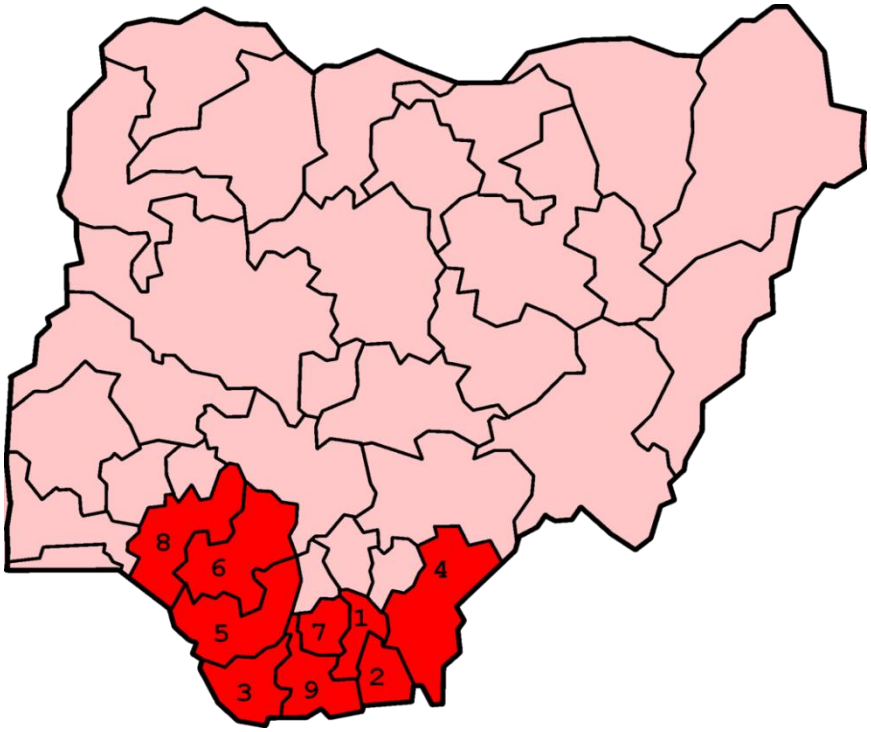
It is normal to anticipate that a project like this whose primary objective is to furnish a response to the question of why violent ethnic mobilisation has continued to persist in the Niger Delta despite efforts to eradicate it, ought to include a contextual overview of the conflict scenario under examination in order to facilitate its comprehension. This is exactly what this chapter aims to accomplish. It is worth mentioning early on that the chapter will not be obsessed with providing a finely detailed chronological history of Nigeria and of the Niger Delta region, but will rather be limited to only those historical events that are relevant, either directly or indirectly, in helping one to make general sense of the regional conflict under review.

This chapter commences with a brief description of the land and the people of the Niger Delta, its pre-colonial socio-political organisations and heritage, as well as the impact that colonialism has had on them and on the conflict dynamics in the region. Next, an effort is made to explain the nature of the pre-independence violent conflict in the Niger Delta, and how this has changed

significantly since Shell's discovery of commercial quantities of oil in the region in 1958. As will subsequently be seen, nearly all major politically salient violent confrontations within the Niger Delta post 1960, are linked, either directly or remotely, to grievances and agitations over oil exploitation and/or, the distribution of its revenue. It is also against this background that the rise of violent ethnic militias in the Niger Delta may be better understood. The chapter concludes with a tabular timeline of major historical events in the Niger Delta region.

The Land and People of the Niger Delta

Map of the Niger Delta region
(numerically identifying its 9 constituent states)



source: world-gazetteer.com

(1) Abia, (2) Akwa Ibom, (3) Bayelsa, (4) Cross River, (5) Delta, (6) Edo, (7) Imo, (8) Ondo, (9) Rivers

The Niger Delta region is located in the South-southern part of Nigeria, and covers about 70,000 square kilometres of the country's land mass. The Niger Delta currently comprises 9 states of the Nigerian Federation – the Edo, Delta, Cross River, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Abia,

Imo and Ondo states - and is home to 31 million inhabitants of such diverse ethnicities as the Ijaw, Itsekiri, Efik, Urhobo, Kalabari, Ogoni, Okrika, Igbo, and Esan, amongst others. Researchers estimate that there are at least 40 identifiable ethnic groups inhabiting the region (CRS 2008; Asuni 2009; Orogun 2009; Okonta *et al.*, 2003). Nnoli (2008) does not necessarily dispute these numbers, but rather points out the difficulty of knowing with certainty the exact number of ethnic groups in either Nigeria or the Niger Delta – a difficulty which, according to him, arises from lack of unanimity amongst researchers and scholars over the criteria for determining what constitutes an ethnic group. For instance, some analysts use language as the primary determinant, while others insist that more than language is required in making ethnic distinctions, principally because ethnic boundaries are sometimes contextualised, especially during moments of political crisis (Nnoli 2008). But then, even amongst those who use linguistics as the main criteria for determining an ethnic group, a fresh difficulty in distinguishing between a language and its dialects is also encountered. Igbo, for instance, is a language spoken by the Igbo people, and which is also used to identify members the Igbo ethnic group. However, there exists another ethnic collectivity which, although speaking an Igbo dialect, do not recognise themselves as Igbos, but rather as the Ikwere ethnic group. Occasions like this create scenarios in which analysts and experts who recognise dialects as substantive languages, and those who do not, disagree about the number of ethnic groups in Nigeria and the Niger Delta. This is why, as Nnoli (2008) notes, the exact number of ethnic groups in Nigeria is unknown. Despite this, the number of ethnic groups in the Niger Delta could conservatively be put at 40. For different opinions about the number of ethnic groups in Nigeria (also in the Niger Delta), see works by Otite (1990), Hoffman, (1994); CRS (2008); Asuni (2009); Orogun (2009); Okonta *et al.* (2003).

The Niger Delta region is also naturally endowed with one of the finest and most fascinating ecosystems in the world. Freshwater swamps, lowland rainforests, and mangrove swamp forests are some of its principal ecological zones. With these, the region is capable of supporting an incredibly wide range of fish, animal and plant species. The precolonial Niger Deltans (and to some reasonable extent, contemporary Niger Deltans) were predominantly fishermen and peasant farmers who produced mainly to feed their immediate families, occasionally selling the surplus for a bit of income. So, they were massively dependent on the fertility of their soil and ecosystem for livelihood. Whatever impacts negatively on their environment has always had enormous consequences on their ability to survive or lead a healthy and balanced life.

Heritage of the Pre-Colonial African Societies: 'Porous States' and Kinship Lineage

Modern African ethnicity, Berman (1998) affirms, is a social construction of the colonial period. Berman's affirmation, far from being a mere subjective adumbration is actually based on historico-empirical research findings. It is a verifiable fact of history, and therefore hugely reliable. Thomson (2010), writing on the topic of ethnicity in Africa upholds Berman's statement, and advises that if anyone wishes to fully appreciate the evolution and character of modern African ethnicity, and its implications for politics and violence, then one ought to go beyond its colonial origins and inquire into the nature of pre-colonial socio-political formations in Africa, notably the issues of 'porous state' and kinship lineage in pre-colonial Africa.

Pre-colonial Africa is incredibly diverse. Different circumstances produced different societies, traditions, customs and politics, as pre-colonial Africans addressed the challenges that confronted them. Despite this diversity, pre-colonial Africa could be grouped, in terms of its socio-political organisation, under two broad categories: states and stateless societies. Evidence that testifies to the existence of strong states in pre-colonial Africa abounds. Thomson (2010) cites the states of Ghana, Mali, Ashanti, Benin, Egypt, Zulu and Bugunda among others, as examples of strong states in pre-colonial Africa. These states were built out of surpluses from agriculture and trans-Saharan trade. Historians now recognise that both technically and socio-politically, some of these great civilisations (states) were ahead of their European contemporaries. Although the existence of states in pre-colonial Africa is no longer an issue that is reasonably questioned among historians, one should be mindful of the fact that the nature of these pre-colonial African states is quite different from the Eurocentric conception of a state as having precisely defined permanent boundaries within which law and order are strictly maintained by a supreme authority. These features of a European state were rare in pre-colonial Africa. The borders of the pre-colonial African states were flexible, and free movement of people was a regular occurrence. It is for this reason that scholars refer to them as 'non-hegemonic states' (Thomson 2010: 11).

Apart from these few strong pre-colonial African states, historians also recognise the existence of other 'stateless' collectivities in pre-colonial Africa. Relatively small economic surpluses and low population densities hindered the formation of states in many parts of Africa (Thomson 2010). But 'statelessness' does not in any way connote backwardness, or that these societies lacked political organisation. Studies now reveal some substantial evidence of the existence, in

these pre-colonial African communities, of sophisticated forms of representation, justice, accountability, and mutual security networks. To this effect, these 'stateless' societies should be understood for what they are – human collectivities whose primary interest was in responding to the concerns of their immediate surrounding, and not in the formation of large political states - types that are more often associated with the Western civilisation (Thomson 2010, Nnoli 2008).

Whether as 'strong' states or as 'stateless' collectivities, pre-colonial Africa generally has a historical trajectory of kinship; that is, the idea of an extended family. In theory, a kinship lineage could trace its past back to the same ancestral origin; and these bonds of origin bind the community together. Realistically however, actual ties are not a continuum; for outsiders are occasionally brought into the clan, and individuals marry into other family lineages. All these show that kinship boundaries in pre-colonial Africa are not only constructed, but also flexible; and this is contrary to the colonialists' primordialist description of ancient African societies as based purely on biological descent (Berman 1998). Rules guiding interpersonal interactions in the precolonial African societies are generally unwritten. They are rather handed down from one generation to the next through customary practices, folklores and oral tradition. Members of these groups understand and abide by them; and there are consequences for breaching them. The head of the community, usually the eldest male person, understood generally as the main custodian of the community's unwritten laws, has a great deal of political power. Another significant feature of the precolonial Kinship group is that it provides solidarity, justice, security and welfare for its members. The wide range of support it provides increases and solidifies people's attachment and bond to their communities (Horowitz 2000, Nnoli 2008).

The description given above of the kinship lineage resembles that of ethnicity in a variety of ways. For instance, an ethnic group, just like a kinship group, lays claim to an imagined collective ancestral decent of its members; and also provides solidarity, welfare, security and identity amongst other things, for its members (Nnoli 2008). Ethnicity is, as Horowitz (2000:57) states, the most extended form of kinship. This is why Berman (1998) also holds that the idea of ethnicity already existed in Africa before the arrival of the colonialists, although it was significantly different from the form that currently. Large ethnic groups with clearly defined boundaries which are obvious features of modern African societies are new, not old. As Berman (1998), Nnoli (2008) and Thomson (2010) observe, there are a creation of the

colonial period. An accumulating weight of scholarly evidence shows that modern African ethnicity, particularly as it relates to politics, is new.

What has been said above regarding the nature of pre-colonial African society is equally applicable to Nigeria and the Niger Delta in the pre-colonial era. The socio-political organisation of the pre-colonial Nigeria is significantly different from the way they currently exist. Nigeria did not have large ethnic groups with neatly demarcated boundaries before colonisation. More of this is discussed in the next section.

A Hint on the Nature of The Precolonial Nigerian (Niger Delta) Societies

In Nigeria, there currently exist over 250 identifiable ethnic groups of different sizes and proportions (Salawu 2010); and forty of these, at least, are found in the Niger Delta region (Ploch 2012; Asunni 2009). Some ethnic groups have a staggering population of over forty million. The populations of the Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, and Ijaw ethnic groups, for instance, are approximately twenty-eight million, fifty million, twenty-eight million and 4.6 million, respectively. These numbers by far exceed the population of many countries of the world, yet in Nigeria, they are mere ethnic groups, not independent nations. This gives one an idea of how large modern ethnic groups in Nigeria can sometimes be. Prior to the colonial era however, ethnic groups in Nigeria did not exist as large collectivities. The Igbo people were, for instance, organised into separate small autonomous political societies, coterminous with villages in pre-colonial times. Although some of these villages had contact with one another through trade, many others did not; and were in fact, to a certain degree, unaware of the existence of other Igbo societies. So, Igbo speaking people had no collective consciousness of their existence as one large ethnic group in pre-colonial times (Nnoli 1989; 2008). The same is equally true of the Yoruba ethnic group of South-Western Nigeria. It was only after colonisation that the term 'Yoruba' came to be used to designate those territories whose rulers traces its ancestry to the mythical Oduduwa. Previously, the term only referred to the Oyo kingdom. These small socio-political groupings, that would later, in the post-colonial era, become part of the larger Yoruba ethnic group, existed in the area as autonomous societies before colonisation, occasionally interacting with one another as and when needed.

The situation was not any different in the pre-colonial era of the Niger Delta region. Alagoa (1972), one of the earliest scholars to have written extensively on the history of the Niger Delta,

narrates that the people of the people of the Niger Delta, especially the Ijaw ethnic group, were, prior to colonisation, organised into small socio-political groupings called *Ibe.* An *Ibe,* according to Alagoa, has no linguistic parallel in English language. The closest English translation for the term is clan; yet *Ibe,* in terms of its composition, is different from a clan as understood in the English language. This is why Alagoa has preferred to retain the original term *Ibe* in his description of the pre-colonial Niger Delta societies. A typical *Ibe*, according to Alagoa (1972), is comprised of a group of villages and persons who speak a common dialect of the Ijaw language and believe in the common ancestral origin of all the villages that make up their *Ibe.* An *Ibe* has no central authority, for every village is politically autonomous and governed on the principles of gerontocracy (government by the elders). Logically, the executive, judicial and legislative functions of village were therefore vested in the oldest man in the village (Ama-Okusuowei, who is also the religious head) and in his cabinet of other elderly men, randomly hand-picked from various kinship lineages of the village. Knowledge of herbs (medicine) and history were the minimum qualification for being appointed into the cabinet. These roles were not hereditary (Alagoa 1972; Alagoa (ed.) 1999; Okaba 1999; Nnoli 2008).

What emerges clearly from the foregoing is that in pre-colonial Nigeria, large ethnic groups did not exist. People, in general, were rather organised into smaller villages which provided them with welfare, justice, security, values, identity and a sense of direction. Although these communities had some sort of boundaries, they were flexible and fluid. In general, pre-colonial kinship ('ethnic') groups and identities in Nigeria were relatively fluid, with some groups occasionally assimilating into another. Dike (1956) describes a case of assimilation between the Igbo and Ijaw ethnic groups of Nigeria during the pre-colonial era. Other instances of interethnic assimilations could be found in Nnoli (1989; 2008). So large, precisely defined, and often politicised, ethnic groups, as are currently evident in modern Nigeria, are recent. They are a social construction of the colonial and post-colonial periods. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The Niger Delta's Uneasy Contact with Early European Merchants and Colonialists

The region's location on the West African coastal waters made it an important commercial centre at the time of the early Portuguese and European commercial ventures between the 15th

and 19th centuries (Ogbogbo 2005). The people of the Niger Delta massively participated as middlemen connecting the European traders with Nigerians in the hinterland. It is worth noting that the relationship between the Europeans (including the British) and the Niger Deltans was that of a formal, and 'mutually beneficial' transaction in goods and services. There were as yet no clear signs that the British harboured any colonial agenda, otherwise peoples' resistance would have been initiated quite early on. The wealth of both the Niger Delta region and of its indigenes grew significantly as a result of their avid participation in the economic activities and trade of the time. It was however not very long before the ignoble colonial project started unfolding, with the colonialists (hitherto disguised as businessmen) seeking to dominate and control every sector of the region's economic and political life. At that point, the people of the Niger Delta, in an effort to maintain its vantage point of middlemen in business and protect its wealth, violently clashed with the colonialists. The well-documented history of numerous violent encounters between the colonialists and the powerful leaders of the Niger Delta such as King Jaja of Opobo, Koko of Nembe and Nana Olomu testifies to the Niger Delta people's effort at maintaining its vantage economic and political position, and ward off these foreign aggressors (Ogbogbo 2005). Despite the region's resistance, the more powerful colonial forces were able eventually to pacify the area, depose its powerful but defiant leaders, exile them, and finally bring the entire region under colonial domination and rule.

Although internal disputes over ownership of fishponds and lands did occasionally occurr among the Niger Deltans themselves, the violent conflict between them and the British invaders were quite remarkable, for it marked the beginning of what would become a long-term resistance to colonialism which eventually culminated in Nigeria's political independence. The negative consequences of colonialism would be felt in both Nigeria and the Niger Delta region for years to come.

Indirect Rule, Ethnic Polarisation and Conflict in the Pre-Independence Nigeria

Colonial rule fittingly described by Berman (1998) as 'an apparatus of authoritarian bureaucratic control' continued to dominate the traditional societies of the Niger Delta and its neighbouring areas. By 1913, the colonial expeditionary forces had already successfully pacified these territories, bringing them completely under colonial rule. In 1914, all the British protectorates in Nigeria, including the Niger Delta area, were amalgamated into one country

by Lord Frederick Lugard. These territories, which had previously functioned as autonomous societies, barely had anything in common except the geographical appellation Nigeria. Despite this obvious fact, they were still forcibly merged for the colonialists' economic and administrative convenience and interests. This was the birth of the new political entity called Nigeria (Colman 1958).

Generally speaking, unification or merging of previously independent societies is not necessarily a bad project, particularly in circumstances where the reason for unification is clear, mutually beneficial, and freely, not forcefully, assented to. Historically, previously independent nations have often merged for good reasons, such as advancing their economic or security interests among others. There are for instance some significant linguistic, historical, and cultural differences between the people of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. But these substantive nations have decided, for reasons that are mutually beneficial, to remain part of the one single political entity called the United Kingdom. The same could also be said about the European union and its member states. The decision to remain part of the union is free, and each constituent member state of the union, as is evident in the case of Brexit (Martill and Staiger 2018), could always decide, out of its own volition to exit the union. However, the same cannot be said about the colonial amalgamation of the previously autonomous societies of pre-colonial Nigeria. They were forcefully merged for the benefits of the colonialist, and not for that of the people. And the latter certainly had not been offered the liberty to exit the union at will. It was in the economic and administrative interests of the colonialists to keep this forced union going – denying pre-colonial Nigerian societies, including the Niger Delta area, the opportunity or right to take charge of their destinies (Coleman 1958; Nnoli 1978; 2008). The colonialists were very much aware of the undesirable consequences of forced union – resistance. It was simply a matter of time before this would begin to occur. To forestall this, they employed the system of 'indirect rule' which is an administrative method by which colonialists ruled over the Africans through their own chiefs and headmen, and institutions – decentralised despotism, as Mamdani (2018) calls it.

As observed by Berman (1998), the primary objective of indirect rule was to keep Nigerians (and Niger Deltans) isolated from one another, and prevent them from engaging in any trans-ethnic anti-colonial mobilisation. Scholars are now unanimous on the fact that indirect rule laid the foundation for the reinforcement of ethnicity and uncivil nationalism in Nigeria by reinforcing ethnic boundaries and inhibiting the formation of strong national consciousness. The colonial state, through its policy of 'indirect rule', highlighted what divided the people

rather than promoting whatever was capable of unifying them. To get a sense of how indirect rule laid the foundation of modern ethnic discrimination, competition and future ethnic conflict, it is necessary to take a quick look at how this colonial policy was implemented in Nigeria.

In 1910, the Land and Native Rights Ordinance was promulgated by the colonial state. This act officially declared that all lands in the Northern Nigeria, with the exception of just a few, were native lands and would henceforth be administered by the colonial government, and obviously through the intermediary of their already existing institutions, as deemed conducive. One of the primary objectives of this law was to limit and control the level of interaction and intermingling between the Northerners and Southerners, such as the Igbos, the Yorubas, and the Ijaws of the Niger Delta amongst other people migrating to the North, for fear that they could undermine the colonialists' highly cherished alliance with the Hausa-Fulani ruling class of the North (Nnoli 2003; 2008). The colonialists had a soft spot for the highly centralised system of government operating in pre-colonial Northern Nigeria. The ruling class of the North had absolute power and control over their subjects, who carefully abided by their injunctions with little or no resistance. They had strict measures in place to effectively chastise defaulters and dissidents. The colonialists were sympathetic to this organisational structure and hierarchy, because it made easier the implementation of their exploitative agenda. Once the colonialists had successfully secured the loyalty and compliance of the ruling class, they also, almost automatically, had a firm grip on the entire population. It was therefore in the interest of the colonial government to do whatever was possible to prevent the intermingling of the Northern and Southern migrants. Hence the promulgation of the Land and Native Rights Ordinance briefly described above. The concrete implementation of this colonial ordinance led to the formulation of the so-called policy of 'Sabon Gari', whose main objective was to physically segregate the Northerners from the Southerners in Northern Nigeria. In Zaria (a city in Northern Nigeria) for instance, the policy of 'Sabon Gari' led to the development of three different categories of settlement: (1)The walled city, which housed the indigenous population of Zaria; (2) 'Tudun Wada', an area housing the non-indigenous northern population; (3) Sabon Gari, a zone housing the southern migrant population, referred to by the colonialists as 'native foreigners' (Nnoli 2003). The desire of the colonial government to shield its agenda from being undermined led to the segregation of pre-colonial Nigerian societies, the reinforcement of ethnic boundaries and the nurturing of ethnic sentiments and conflict. History has it that Sir Hugh Clifford, a colonial governor of Nigeria, actively encouraged ethnic polarisation in the country. In 1920 for instance, he is reported to have declared: 'I am entirely convinced of the

right, for example, of the people of Egbaland ... or any of the great emirates of the North ... to maintain that each one of them is, in a very real sense, a nation .... It is the task of the government of Nigeria to build up and fortify these national institutions' (quoted in Coleman 1958: 194; Osaghae 1999; Nnoli 2003). Sir Clifford's recognition of the historical and cultural differences between the pre-colonial Nigerian ethnic formations is correct. Both historical and ethnographic studies now reveal substantial historical and cultural differences between the composite sections of the country. But beyond this, one ought to understand that the colonial state was an apparatus for bureaucratic control and exploitation (Berman 1998), always seizing any available opportunity to propagate whatever favoured its goals. Sir Clifford leveraged the obvious historico-cultural differences of Nigerian ethnic categories to spread the propaganda that Nigerians had no common destiny *vis-à-vis* political independence. It was therefore the role of the colonial government, he argued, to secure the right of each ethnic group to maintain its uniqueness, individuality, identity, nationality – its right to self-determination and the chosen form of government that draws on the accumulated wisdom and experiences of previous generations (Nnoli 2003). Clifford's emphasis on differences, rather than points of convergence, was a colonial strategy aimed at preventing trans-ethnic anti-colonial mobilisation for political independence and the undoing of the colonial project in Nigeria (Berman 1998; Nnoli 2008; Thomson 2010). This was not because the colonial state genuinely cared about the protection and organic advancement of the pre-colonial Nigerian societies. If the latter was the case, the amalgamation of these previously independent territory into one country by Lord Lugard in 1914 would not have happened. The foundation of ethnic polarisation and ethnocentrism was largely laid in the colonial period through the implementation of the policy of indirect rule, and this had implications for the violent ethnic mobilisation witnessed in some of the major cosmopolitan cities of colonial Nigeria as people aligned themselves along ethnic lines in unhealthy inter-ethnic competitions over access to political positions and wealth. Nnoli (2003) locates the roots of the violent ethnic tensions of Jos 1945, and of Enugu 1949, in the embers of ethnic discrimination and polarisation fanned into flames by the colonialists.

Post colonially, modern Nigerians, just as was the case during the colonial era, are yet to fully overcome ethnic cleavages and unite behind a collective national project (Coleman 1958; Nnoli 1999; 2008). Ethnicity, as shall be seen in Chapter Six below, continues to matter in post-colonial Nigeria. In the work of Nnoli (1999; 2008) and Ukiwo (2005) among others, there exists some well-founded evidence of the impact of ethnicity in the apportioning and

distribution of the socio-economic and political values of the Nigerian state. Most of the post-colonial violent ethnic mobilisations in Nigeria, and in the Delta have been linked to the socio-economic and political marginalisation of the minority ethnic groups, or an outright denial of their due.

Setting the Stage for Post-Independence Grievances and Conflict in the Niger Delta

Nigeria got her independence in the year 1960. This was the outcome of the efforts of Nigerian elites who managed to transcend ethno-cultural differences and formed a number of independence movements that fought for and gained political independence. At that historical moment, the priority of all of them was the expulsion of the common enemy (the colonialists), and the inauguration of self-rule. Apart from that, none had a clear blueprint of what a post-colonial Nigeria should look like, or how to address the issue of ethnic pluralism - an obvious feature of the colonial Nigerian state. At the time of independence therefore, the political and administrative difficulties often associated with young and emerging states were still very much present. Paramount among these was the challenge posed by ethnicity. The colonialists encouraged and promoted ethnocentrism and ethnic polarisation because it served their agenda very well. It is important to recall that the colonial state in Africa was not designed to be an agent of democracy, but rather an apparatus of bureaucratic control and economic exploitation (Berman 1998; Nnoli 2008). It was therefore in its interest to prevent inter-ethnic cooperation and alliances, for these, the colonialists thought, were capable of seriously undermining the colonial project; hence their introduction of the policy of 'indirect rule' that promoted ethnic polarisation. This strategy may have worked for the colonial state, but was definitely unsuitable for the proper functioning of a democratic nation-state (independent Nigeria). An independent and democratic nation-state, as Udogu (1990) notes, demands that people go beyond ethnic cleavages and foster a stronger national consciousness. However, the new independent Nigerian state was ill equipped to address this challenge. She basically entered independence with the baggage of ethnic division – inherited from the colonial period, as well as all its associated problems such as ethnic favouritism in the distribution of jobs and positions. Before independence, ethnicity was already playing a significant role in job and wealth distribution as people favoured people of their own ethnic background, thus laying the foundation for ethnic animosities and conflict. Politicians rode on the back of ethnicity to gain the votes required for

access to political positions. Already in office, these elected politicians rewarded their ethnic supporters with appointments, contracts, and other favours. These rewards, according to Chabal and Daloz (1999) are usually not one-off, but rather form part of a larger ploy to keep them constantly at their service. When the ethnic population provides the necessary support, the ethnic politicians reward them for it. This is how this patron-client relationship or network was, and is still being kept alive in post-independence Nigeria. Generally, ethnicity provided the mobilisational base needed to get elected at the national level. Quite naturally, those of the majority ethnic groups such as the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa were very frequently elected. They usually had the numerical strength to put their men in power. However, the case was different for ethnic minority groups, including the ethnic groups of Niger Delta area. They lacked the numbers and were therefore quite frequently not elected to national positions, which, in Nigeria, has some implications for wealth distribution and appointment to jobs. Consequently, their interest was quite frequently not advanced – for their own people were not sufficiently in power. This unequal access of ethnic groups to state power and resources would become a major source of violent agitation in Nigeria in the years to come. In no other Nigerian historical epoch is the link between ethnicity, resources and violent conflict more evident than after the discovery of commercial quantities of oil in the Niger Delta region.

The Discovery of Oil, a Game Changer in Violent Conflict in the Niger Delta

The discovery of oil in the small town of Oloibiri in the Niger Delta region by Shell in 1956 was not only a game changer in the dynamics of the Niger Delta conflict, but also very central in understanding and explaining the motifs behind the waves of violent ethnic mobilisation in the post-independence Niger Delta. One could in fact argue that the phenomenon of violent mobilisation in the region cannot be fully explained without considering the important role of oil in the entire conflict.

Prior to the discovery of oil in commercial quantities, Nigeria's economy was agro-based. Nearly all its foreign exchange earnings came from exporting agricultural products to Europe and other countries of the global west. However, with the discovery of oil in commercial quantities, there was a substantial shift from agriculture to a heavy reliance on oil. Most of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings from then on were derived more from the international sale of crude oil than from agriculture. Ogbogbo (2005) reports that about a decade after the

discovery of oil in the Niger Delta, Nigeria was already exporting approximately 139,548,969 barrels per year, which roughly translates to more than £91,942,000. By any standards, that was a very large sum of money in the 1960s. The Niger Delta's oil had without equivocation become the most important sector of Nigeria's economy, accounting back then for over 60 percent of the country's entire foreign exchange earnings. More than ten multinational oil companies operated in Nigeria. Today the contribution of the oil sector to the country's economy has increased significantly to about 90 percent, unequivocally making Nigeria an oil-based economy, and by extension making the Niger Delta region the greatest contributor to national wealth (Francis *et al*. 2011).

Despite all this, the Niger Delta region does not seem to be receiving a fair share of the oil revenue it generates. Of all the ethno-regional categorisations of Nigeria, the Niger Delta area is amongst the poorest and most deprived. Poor infrastructure, a high level of unemployment, environmental degradation due to careless oil exploration activities, and inadequate educational facilities are some of the challenges facing the region (Ogbogbo 2005; Faleti 2013). Quite logically, the region has expected that at least a fair portion of the enormous wealth generated within its borders should be deployed to address some of these challenges, but the basic and vital needs of the inhabitants of these areas have been ignored while their wealth has been continually channelled towards the development of other parts of the country, especially those areas belonging to the majority ethnic groups. On a number of occasions, the Niger Delta region has formally complained to the federal government regarding this issue, which it perceived as an act of injustice, and as gross negligence of the needs and plight of the region. However, sufficient concrete steps have not been taken to address or alleviate the suffering of the region. Left with no other option, the region has resorted to protests, and violent mobilisation along ethno-regional lines in a serious demand for self-determination and control of their resources.

The Niger Delta's Push for Self-Determination and Resource Control

The first major episode of violent ethnic mobilisation in the post-independence Niger Delta was organised and led by Adaka Boro in February 1966. This was a secession attempt in which he declared the Niger Delta an independent Republic. Boro's primary objective was to sever the region's relationship with Nigeria – a country which he thought did not care much about the interest of the Niger Delta People. A pertinent and valid question that may be raised here

is: why did the newly independent Nigerian state disregard advancing the interest of the Niger Delta area? One would have expected that after such a long time of collective oppression and suffering under the colonialists, the new political leaders would have empathised with the ethnic minority regions that were lagging behind in key political appointments and in the distribution of the socio-economic values of the new state. But this was not the case, mainly because the new Nigerian state, as already mentioned above, was not purposefully and properly institutionalised. Its *raison d'être*, apart from breaking free from the colonialists, had never been clear from the onset. Post-independence, Nigerian politicians inherited the state structure that had been specifically designed to exploit Nigerians and serve the interest of the colonialists and did not make any substantial modification. They simply replaced the colonialists who had benefited directly from the spoil that this official state apparatus enabled – a condition often referred to by scholars such as Hechter (1975) and Wolpe (1975) as 'internal colonialism'; that is, the domination and exploitation of natives by natives, as opposed to the domination of natives by foreigners (Casanova 1965).[2] It was a 'winner takes it all' sort of scenario, as these politicians often sought to perpetuate their term of office by providing favours to individuals, organisations, and their own ethnic base (on whose back they rode to victory), in exchange for its continual loyalty and support. The implication of this is that the minority ethnic groups who were always weaker in numerical terms in comparison to the majority ethnic groups, might never get a chance to lift their own people or politicians into the corridors of power, and *ipso facto* would hardly ever be able to get a good opportunity to advance their own ethno-regional

[2] The term 'internal colonialism' is employed here with utmost criticalness. While this project understands the core information that users of the expression such as Hechter (1975) and Wolpe (1975) try to put across, it is important, the current thesis contends, to ensure that neither 'colonialism' nor 'internal colonialism' is employed in a manner that suggests that the only distinction between the concepts lies in the qualifying adjective 'internal' – to signify the domination and exploitation of natives by natives, as opposed to the domination and exploitation of natives by foreigners (colonialism). The ruthlessness, vileness and loathsomeness of colonialism in Nigeria and Africa cannot be accurately compared with the internal (intra-state) hegemony, or preponderance, of one ethnic group over another. In the latter scenario, there is at least some sort of competition between two distinct and autonomous ethnic categories, even if one group were, for instance, dominant and constantly outcompeting the other. This sort of situation is pervasive, and could be found in many nation-states across the globe, and throughout historical epochs. However, the former (colonialism proper) is a carefully designed system of domination and exploitation in which some state-sponsored foreign forces invade, dominate, and exploit an unsuspecting and vulnerable people - dramatically changing their institutional structures, *modus vivendi* and destiny. The horror of colonialism is well captured in the words of Frantz Fanon: '…Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of an oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today' (Fanon 1963: 210). The impacts of both 'colonialism' and so-called 'internal colonialism' are not on the same scale, therefore not comparable in any meaningful way. This issue has been raised here in order to clarify that the use of the expression 'internal colonisation' is metaphorical, and done with full awareness that the concepts of 'colonisation' and 'internal colonization' are not interchangeable *salva veritatae*. This clarification is not entirely novel. Other scholars, such as Casanova (1965) and Hunter (1977), have made similar observations in the past.

interests within such an ethnically plural state as Nigeria, where ethnic competition, not cooperation, has become incredibly fierce. It was frustration over the seemingly perpetual unequal access of ethnic minorities, such as those of the Niger Delta, to the socio-economic and political benefits of the Nigerian state that caused Adaka Boro to lead a rebellion in which he sought the secession of the Niger Delta region from Nigeria and to form a new republic: the Niger Delta Republic.

This 'new Republic' did not, however, see the light of the day, for the Nigerian Federal forces successfully thwarted the rebellion and re-integrated the Niger Delta region into Nigeria. But the *status quo* remained pretty much the same, as not much was done to address the injustices in reaction to which the region had attempted to secede. The regional grievances continued to simmer until the 1990s when Saro Wiwa, an indigene of the Niger Delta and the founder of an ethnic movement MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People) led a non-violent, but incredibly potent protest against the Nigerian government over the environmental degradation of Ogoni land due to some unethical and careless oil exploitation activities that led to oil spillage in the area. Saro Wiwa's cause was cut short as he was arrested and hurriedly tried in what may best be described as a rogue military tribunal. Eventually, under the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha, he was executed (Ogbogbo 2005; Faleti 2013).

The Rise of Ethnic Militia Groups in the 1990s

The unjust execution of Saro Wiwa sparked wide-ranging fury among Niger Deltans, leading later on to the formation of multiple ethnic militias that proactively and violently demanded self-determination for the Niger Delta region, as well as total control of the region's resources, including oil. The Ijaw Youth Movement (IYC), the Egbesu Boys (EB), the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta People (MEND) are among the armed militia groups that have popped up in the Niger Delta to violently confront the Federal government over the region's environmental pollution and socio economic and political marginalisation. Because these violent militia organisations claimed to be fighting on behalf of the entire Niger Delta population, they were all too often supported either wholly or partially by the Niger Deltans themselves. The harsh socio-economic challenges faced by the inhabitants of the region are very real, and they agree unanimously that the government should be challenged about it. However, when it comes to whether or not violence is the right way to proceed, opinions vary. While some Niger Delta

ethnic organisation such as the MOSSOP, that is, the followers of Ken Saro-Wiwa, preferred the path of non-violent protest, the militia groups cited above and their supporters thought that force should be matched with force, and violence with violence. The *modus operandi* of these other violent ethnic militia groups ranged from vandalising oil production and transportation facilities, to oil bunkering and kidnapping of expatriates working for the oil multinationals, among other similar crimes. These nefarious activities progressively led to the decline of oil production and export in Nigeria, and consequently a huge fall in the income generated through the international sale of the Nigeria's oil (Ogbogbo 2008; Okodua 2010; Faleti 2013). Initially, the Nigerian government's general reaction to this new development was militarisation of the region as a means of quelling the violent insurrections. Over 10,000 troops and 2 war ships were, according to Ogbogbo (2008), deployed to fight the Niger Delta militants. The government's aim of subduing the violent militants through the use of military force was unsuccessful, as the militants' highly sophisticated arms and expertise helped them to engage effectively and efficiently with the military, making it difficult to completely overpower them (the militants). The government's realisation of the ineffectiveness of military force in permanently resolving the regional crisis compelled it to consider other alternatives which entailed the use of negotiations and dialogue.

The Phase of Government Negotiations, Policy Formulations and Implementation

The persistent violent push by the Niger Deltans and their militia groups for absolute control of their oil resources compelled the Nigerian government to rethink its revenue allocation formula. In section 162(2) of the country's 1999 constitution, a provision was made to officially allocate 13% of all the revenue from the sale of Nigeria's oil to the Niger Delta region and all its constituent parts. This was a smart move by the federal government to calm down the regional violence, and to some extent neutralise the region's demand for total control of all its resources. This positive development, it should be highlighted, was the outcome of substantial pressure by Niger Deltan governors and elites, as well as, obviously, the violent ethnic militants (Ogbogbo 2008; Ako 2011; Orogun 2010). Although the implementation of this revenue allocation formula took effect in April 2000, the people of the Niger Delta were still not satisfied with 13%, which they regarded as insufficient. Fifty percent was the minimum that some Niger Deltans were ready to consider. Given that Nigeria is an oil-based economy, with

oil accounting for about 95 percent of its earnings, allocating 50% to the Niger Delta, which is just one of six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, would be destabilising for the entire country. However, judged by the region's historical antecedents, such a demand, many argue, is not entirely misplaced For instance, Orogun (2010) recalls that during the British colonial administration, and prior to the discovery of large quantities of oil in the Niger Delta, the revenue allocation formula was based on a 100% derivation principle; each region had the right to manage the entirety of its resources, and to be economically creative and responsible for the outcome of its choices and ventures. In those early years of the country's history, the Niger Delta area was not as economically prosperous as other regions such as the North, West or Eastern parts of the country. In fact, it quite frequently needed financial support from the country to address some of the peculiar developmental challenges it faced due the hazardous nature of its environment (the Niger Delta is a wetland and prone to flooding - rendering the construction of roads and other infrastructures extremely difficult and significantly more expensive than in other parts of the country). Unfortunately, the assistance usually requested by the Niger Deltans was often not supplied, mainly because each region, in accordance with the sort of fiscal federalism operating in Nigeria back then was one of economic independence with each state responsible for the ownership and management of its resources, natural and otherwise (Ogbogbo 2008; Orogun 2010). This meant the Niger Delta region was to a very great extent at the mercy of other regions' goodwill, which was unfortunately not always forthcoming.

Oddly enough, after the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta, the first civilian democratic administration in Nigeria (1960-1965), composed mainly of the majority ethnic groups, pegged the derivation formula on mineral producing regions at 50%. At the time when oil became one of the most important sources of income in the country, the Niger Delta region, at the behest of the ruling majority ethnic groups, was denied its right to own and control the entirety of its resources, as had hitherto been the case. Between 1970 and 1984, a period of pervasive military coups and dictatorship, the revenue allocation formula based on the derivation principle was once again dramatically reduced. For instance, in 1975, the oil revenue allocation to the Niger Delta region was reduced from 50% to 20%. In 1982, it was slashed again to 2%. Further declining to 1.5% by 1984. It was that draconian. To this day, most Niger Deltans continue to believe that they have been unjustly treated, ignored and marginalised due to their minority status, by the majority ethnic groups who have continually used the apparatus of the state to change the rules of the game to their advantage. This was also the feedback I received during

my fieldwork in the region. At the time when the Niger Delta region had the most promising opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty, after years of neglect by the Nigerian polity, the rules of the game were changed by the majority ethnic groups in their own favour, to the disadvantage of the oil producing minority region of the Niger Delta. Considered against this background, it is fairly easy to understand the drive behind the Niger Delta's agitation for resource control, and why they are not fully satisfied with the 13% derivation allocation they currently receive on their resources (Orogun 2010). Although the issue of resource control is far from being fully resolved, the Federal government's increased resource derivation allocation from 1.5% in 1984 to 13% 1999 (its current rate), undoubtedly constitutes one of the major governmental efforts at resolving the Niger Delta crisis. Later on, the presidential amnesty initiative of President Yaradua was added to the series of efforts to resolve the regional agitations.

The Presidential Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta

The presidential amnesty programme represents a real attempt by the Federal government of Nigeria at conflict mitigation and resolution in the Niger Delta region. Shortly after his assumption of office in 2007, President Yaradua set up a Presidential Committee on Amnesty and Disarmament of the Niger Delta Militants. This body was charged with the task of designing a feasible framework for the disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and integration of fighters (Ikelegbe 2010). For President Yaradua, this seemed an obvious thing to do, especially as previous governmental efforts at resolving the regional crisis have not delivered the desired outcomes (Chiedozie 2008). The work and recommendations of this committee culminated in the presidential declaration, on the 25th of June 2009, of amnesty for the Niger Delta militants - the objective being to incentivise these non-state combatants to abandon violent militancy and embrace the presidential amnesty package that aimed to reintegrate them profitably into normal society. Those militants who welcomed and participated in this amnesty programme allegedly handed in their arms (weapons) to the federal government, which in return rewarded them with monthly stipends while demobilising and training them for employment in normal society. It is recorded that the Federal government earmarked a whopping sum of no less than 127 billion Naira between 2009 and 2011 solely in support of this programme (Abdallah 2012). Three years after the inauguration and implementation of the amnesty programme, available statistics showed that conflict had

declined considerably and that oil production, sales and revenue had increased significantly (Hinshaw 2012). This is one of the positive impacts of the presidential amnesty programme. These positive effects were, however, short-lived, as the amnesty programme itself did not completely rid the Niger Delta region of violent militancy. What it did was to momentarily halt violent attacks, but the latter quickly returned once the amnesty period was over and the militants stopped receiving regular monthly stipends from the state. This does not however mean that all the ex-militants returned again to their creeks. Certainly some, particularly their leaders such as Asari Dokubo, Tompolo and Jomo Gbomo, among others who made an awful lot of money from the amnesty programme, became too wealthy and comfortable to return to a life of violent militancy. However, some who did not benefit as much returned once more to piracy and violent militancy, for in some way it was financially rewarding to remain a militant (Ogbogbo 2005; 2008).

Militancy in the Niger Delta has not ceased to attract new members, who under the guise of the 'fight against injustice', continue to pursue their own private selfish socio-economic objectives through the perpetuation of violence in the region. As shall be seen in what follows, the pursuit of private interests is one of the reasons why this regional violence has continued to persist.

Niger Delta Timeline

This timeline is the outcome of a creative adaptation of Francis, P., et al's (2011) and Falola, T., et al's (2008) timelines of both Nigeria and the Niger Delta. The aim of this timeline is to provide a very quick overview of some major historical events that may help the reader to make sense of the context of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region.

Period	Historical Events
600 BCE	There is some evidence of iron technology used by Nok civilisation. Geographically, Nok is located near the current day capital of Nigeria, Abuja.
1300 -1600	This epoch is often described as the 'golden age' of trans-Saharan trade due to booming economic activities of a diverse nature taking place at this time. Slaves, gold and other valuable commodities were traded from Northern Nigeria across the Sahara, North Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The slave trade continued across the Sahara until the 19th century, though in a highly reduced manner due to increases in direct trade with the Europeans in West African coastal waters in the 15th century AD.
1450 -1850	The slave trade, which was prevalent in the Niger Delta coastal waters during this historical epoch, shaped the economic and political life of the region. Although there was trade in other commodities within the region, these did not significantly shape the political and economic future of the region to the same extent as the the slave trade.
Early 1800s – mid-1900s	Following Great Britain's ban on formal participation in slave trade in 1807, its merchants turned their attention to the Niger Delta's palm oil which was very useful for the production of soap, lotion,

	and other products - making the Niger Delta an economic nerve centre of colonial Nigeria.
1886	The formation of the British Royal Niger Company (BRC) which had the monopoly of trade in the Niger Delta Basin up to 1900 when its charter was revoked.
1894	Chief Nana Olomu of Itsekiri, in the Niger Delta region, revolted against the Royal Niger Company. He was consequently deposed and exiled for preventing the British from accessing the interior markets of the Niger Delta and beyond.
1914	The Northern and the Southern protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated by Lord Lugard. This act was done primarily for the administrative and economic convenience of the colonialists.
1914 - 1918	Nigerian military troops were enlisted to assist the British cause in the First World War.
1923	The establishment of Clifford's constitution which, for the first time, allowed for the participation of elected representatives in the governance of Nigeria.
1946	The enactment of the Richards Constitution which formally partitioned Nigeria into three regions: the North, the South- East, and the South-West.
1956	Shell Multinational oil company discovered oil in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta town of Oloibiri. Shell first exported oil in 1958.
1960	Nigeria gained political independence from Great Britain under a parliamentary system of government in which the constituent

	regions of the federation had great administrative and economic autonomy.
1963	Nigeria became a Republic for the first time, replacing the Queen of England with the first indigenous Nigerian president, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe.
1966	Isaac Adaka Boro, an Ijaw man of the Niger Delta area, led a revolution against the Nigerian government and declared the Niger Delta region an independent country.
1966 - 1969	The first military regime in Nigeria created a new state - Rivers State - thus giving greater autonomy to the core oil producing states of the Niger Delta.
1967 - 1970	Civil war between the Nigerian federal forces and the Biafran separatist soldiers. The war ended in 1970 with the surrender of Biafra on January 12th, 1970, and the reintegration of Biafra into Nigeria.
1969	The Federal government's petroleum decree unilaterally transferred the ownership and control of all petroleum resources in the Niger Delta to the Federal government of Nigeria.
1971	Nigeria became a member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).
1979 - 1983	The era of Nigeria's Second Republic
1983	The Second Republic was overthrown in a military coup on December 31st, which led to the emergence of Muhammadu Buhari as Military Head of State.

1985	Another military coup, ousting Buhari and imposing Ibrahim Babangida as the new military head of state in Nigeria.
1990	Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSSOP) issued the Ogoni Bill of Rights – a document that outlined the demands of the Ogoni people from the Federal government over the degradation of their environment due to some unethical and carefree oil exploitation in Ogoniland of the Niger Delta region.
1995	The execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa - a human rights and environmental activist, and his 9 other colleagues. This was perhaps the most infuriating manifestation of Sani Abacha's military tyranny.
1997 - 2003	Three successive waves of petroleum related violent ethnic mobilisation in the Warri city of the Niger Delta. The Federal government used a very brutal force to quell these violent insurrections.
1998	The pronouncement of the famous 'Kayama Declaration' in which the Ijaw youths of the Niger Delta advocated for self-determination, total control of their resources and the withdrawal of oil industries from their land.
1999	The commencement of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, with Olusegun Obasanjo as the president. During this time, the oil revenue allocated to the Niger Delta region, the oil producing area of Nigeria, was increased from 1.5 percent to 13 percent.
2004	Asari Dokubo, an ethnic militia leader, declared an all-out war (operation locust feast) against the Nigerian government. The then

	Nigerian president: Olusegun Obasanjo, unsuccessfully reached out for peace, as the violent protests raged on.
2005	Asari Dokubo, one of the most notorious ethnic militia leaders in the Niger Delta was arrested and jailed. Aggrieved by this incident, all the violent ethnic organisations in the Niger Delta formed a coalition under the name MEND (Movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta) to press for his release. Kidnapping of oil workers, oil bunkering and theft, and attack on oil facilities were some of the illegitimate avenues used by MEND to pressurise the government into releasing Mr. Dokubo.
2007	Musa Yaradua was elected president of Nigeria and pledged to pay more attention to the crisis in the Niger Delta and do whatever was necessary to resolve it.
2009	On the 15th of May, a high-profile joint military operation was carried out against MEND for the killing of soldiers and some expatriates. This clash led to a fall in oil production as MEND and the Nigeria Army engaged one another in a prolonged battle. President Yaradua later on granted a presidential amnesty to the Niger Delta militants as part of his effort at resolving this persistent problem. The amnesty programme was only partially successful as not all the militants participated in the programme.
2010	Following the demise of President Yaradua in office, his deputy Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as the substantive president of Nigeria. He is the first Niger Delta person to rule Nigeria. But his presidency has not managed to put an end to the Niger Delta crisis.
2011 - 2019	Violence in the Niger Delta persists to this day. Although a few militia organisations have emerged within this period, the cause

they claim to be fighting for is not substantially different from that of their predecessors.

PREAMBLE TO CHAPTERS 4, 5 AND 6

Chapters four, five and six collectively constitute what may be rightly described as the empirical section of this thesis. In them the bulk of the original data obtained during the fieldwork in the Niger Delta are analysed and engaged with in a more critical and elaborate manner.

To enable a smoother transition from the previous chapters (mainly theoretical) to the next and more empirical ones, it is pertinent to provide some sort of prologue as a way of refreshing the mind of the reader on what has gone before and what next to anticipate, as well as how both complement each other as parts of a single monograph (the whole thesis).

Early on in this document, the primary objective of the current research was announced as a quest to find out why violent ethnic mobilisations have persisted in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria despite governmental efforts to eradicate them. Theoretical evaluation of the context of violence in the Niger Delta revealed that no other theory is more suitable than Ethnosymbolism in understanding and finding solutions to the problem of violent mobilisation in the region. Hence the reason for its selection as the theoretical framework within which the entire research project is pursued. The Kaufmanian version of ethnosymbolism used here is particularly potent for providing a robust explanation of how and why ethnic violence occurs and persists. According to Kaufman (2001), for extreme violent ethnic conflict to take place, the following conditions are necessary: interest, manipulative elites, and ethnicity (ethnic myth/symbol complexes). It is the complex interaction of these elements that causes ethnic violence to occur. In other words, ethnic violence occurs and persists when manipulative elites tap into hostile ethnic myths to orchestrate violent turmoil as a means of attaining some preconceived objectives or interests. To examine these causal conditions a bit more critically and elaborately, each has been made to form a core theme of one of the chapters that constitute the empirical phase of this thesis (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Chapter 4 will investigate in what way(s), if any, 'interest' may have causally contributed to the spiralling and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta. Where possible it will do so with concrete historical examples. Chapter 5 will examine whether or not manipulative elites have played roles in the spiralling and sustenance of the regional violent conflict under study. In Chapter 6, the possible roles of ethnicity in the spiralling of ethnic violence will also be examined. In doing all this, the opinions of those interviewed on these subjects during the data collection

exercise will also be critically appraised. The overall aim has been to establish whether Kaufman's theoretical submissions are tenable.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONTRIBUTION, OR OTHERWISE, OF INTEREST IN THE GENERATION AND PERSISTENCE OF THE NIGER DELTA VIOLENCE

This chapter explores the role, or contribution, of 'interest' in the generation, escalation, and sustenance of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The core stance defended here is that violent ethnic conflict cannot occur unless there is some sort of interest, real or imagined, at stake (Kaufman, 2001). Analysing some relevant cases of violent confrontation in the Niger Delta region, the chapter affirms and upholds the importance of 'interest' in meaningfully explaining the rise and persistence of ethnic violence in the region under study. The analysis of the interviews conducted with members of elites, as well as the conclusions of the supplementary and triangulation materials deployed, also corroborates this affirmation.

The 'rational choice' assumption that calculus over obtainable interests is the principal driver of violent ethnic mobilisation is not always as straightforward as it might seem. For the economy and resource-based theorists of ethnic violence, amongst others, this assumption does not constitute a problem. However, the same may not confidently be said of those individuals who might still be somewhat sympathetic, either consciously or unconsciously, to primordialist theory, or its ancient hatred doctrine. In the theoretical chapter, it was made clear that primordialism as a framework for evaluating and resolving the problem of ethnic violence has been superseded, and is no longer considered credible, at least amongst many key scholars of ethnic violence. This does not however imply that there are no longer individuals, even if they are in the minority, who still tend to understand and interpret ethnic violence scenarios through the prism of primordialist theory. As both Kaufman (2001) and Taylor (2011) have pointed out, as recently as the 1990s and 2000s, there were attempts to explain the extreme violent conflict that took place both in Rwanda and in the Balkans from the perspective of primordialist theory – an indication that this mode of evaluating the contexts of ethnic violence, even if intellectually problematic, has not yet been completely abandoned in some parts of the world. Might this also still be the case with regard to the Niger Delta? This chapter elects to set the record straight on this, that is, to clarify whether or not there are still theorists who view and interpret violent conflict in the Niger Delta from the standpoint of primordialism; in other words, who downplay or entirely deny that competing interests constitute a key factor in the rise and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the region. This is critically important,

because it helps, not just to gain a better understanding of the nature and main drivers of the regional crisis, but also in the construction of a bespoke and more appropriate conflict resolution plan for the region, which cannot happen unless we understand how regional conflict is perceived, understood, or interpreted.

Interview Data

For the purpose of this research, I interviewed a total number of 16 individuals (members of the elite) about the causality of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta. Among the plethora of responses there were none that suggested that the regional crisis is understood through the prism of primordialism. On the contrary, all, without exception, affirmed interest rather than primordial ethnic impulses, as the key driver of ethnic violence in the region. Although these individuals were not, strictly speaking, academic experts on the subject of ethnic violence, they were able to draw conclusions about the contributory roles of competing interests in the spiralling of ethnic violence in the region. For instance, one community leader interviewed had this to say: 'if not for the selfish 'interests' of both the militants, and also of those individuals occupying the government seats, the issue of violence in the Niger Delta area would have long been resolved' (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria; April 2017). In expressing his opinion, another individual interviewed, a political leader, said:

> *I am aware that both the corrupt occupants of government positions and the violent ethnic militia groups pursue their respective 'interests'. But the way out of this trouble, I think, is for the federal government to harmonise these conflicting interests for the benefit of the entire country. (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria; May 2017)*

A similar expression involving the use of the term 'interest' was also used by another traditional ruler interviewed. In his words:

> *I am not saying that all the militants have the good of the people at heart. Some of them use the opportunity to seek for their own selfish interests, rather than for the good of the public. (Interview response by a Member of Bayelsa state House of Assembly in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State Nigeria; June 2017)*

I have referred to these individuals, not because they are the only respondents to have made use of the term interest, but rather as representative of all those interviewees, and there were

many, who employed the term in the articulation and presentation of their opinions. For me, it was quite interesting to observe that although the interview questions did not explicitly employ the term 'interest', the responses provided by the respondents overwhelmingly did. Although the questions had been carefully constructed to elicit information on the role of 'interest' in the evolution of the Niger Delta violent conflict, explicit mention of the term was carefully avoided in order not to influence respondents' choice of words in replying to the questions posed. This strategy notwithstanding, nearly all the interviewees spontaneously made an explicit mention of the term 'interest' in their answers. Should their usage of the term be dismissed as a mere coincidence or be understood for what it is – that elites are acutely aware that competing egoistic or sectional interests constitute a key driver of violent ethnic mobilisation in the region under investigation? Considering that my respondents were well-informed elites, who, in the course of their conversations with me, had calmly and carefully chosen their words, there are no reasonable grounds for believing that their decision to use the term was entirely arbitrary. Based on this, this thesis concludes that if these respondents used the word 'interest' of their own volition, this is most probably because it was of great relevance for them in understanding, articulating and communicating their thoughts on phenomenon of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta region. When closely examined, the views of my interviewees on this issue were found to correspond fundamentally with those of Kaufman (2001) - the theorist within whose ethnosymbolic framework the current research is being conducted.

Supplementary/Triangulation Data

For triangulation, I expanded the data collection base – drawing on a wide range of already existing, but relevant television and print media interviews of youth leaders, technocrats, ex-militants, politicians, government officials, conducted by other investigators, especially journalists. I obtained, transcribed, and made use of 21 such data sources. These materials were rich, diverse, and helpful in confirming and further strengthening the validity and reliability of the elite interviews. While examining and analysing these supplementary documents, I meticulously searched for evidence that might suggest that the Niger Delta violent conflict is being either understood and/or interpreted from a strictly primordialist theoretical standpoint – just as early European anthropologists in Africa did, and as some contemporary commentators on extreme violent ethnic conflict in Rwanda and Balkans, have tried to do. My findings, however, overwhelmingly showed that competing personal or sectional interests, as opposed

to primordial impulsive animosities, constitute a major causality of Niger Delta violent conflict. The responses provided by the following categories of individuals are representative. In an interview with the TVC News, Nigeria, Bristol Alagbariya, the secretary of the Ijaw youth movement, indicated that the pursuit of personal interest, rather the collective public good or interest, is among the major reasons why the crisis in the Niger Delta continues to occur and persist (Bristol Alagbariya's interview with TVC News, Nigeria, on June 17, 2016). Henry Okah's response was similar. Okah, a Niger Delta militant and arms dealer, hinted that the exclusion of the Ijaw ethnic 'interest' by the Federal government of Nigeria constitutes a reason for the occurrence and persistence of the Niger Delta crises (Henry Okah, as reported in the Saharah Reporters, 2008). In another exclusive interview with the Vanguard Newspaper, Asari Dokubo, an ex-president of the Ijaw Youth Council, recognised that the pursuit of private interest to the detriment of the collective good or interest of the Ijaw people of the Niger Delta is a major contributor to regional conflict. He therefore pledged not to act in the same way. Ijaw interest, he said, would always be the priority. In his own words:

> *Maybe I will benefit, but I should not put my benefit over and above the interest of the generality of the people. The way forward is let the right thing be done. (Asari Dokubo's interview with the Vanguard Newspaper, Nigeria, November 4, 2019)*

Apart from these individuals, who literally evoked the term interest as a causal factor in the rise and persistence of the Niger Delta conflict, were many others who did not directly employ the term 'interest', but used synonymous concepts or expressions such as: economic marginalisation, looting of resources, corruption, syphoning of public funds. All these denote various ways in which individuals or groups prioritise, and illegally pursue, private or sectional interests, rather than public interest, even though the notion of interest is here implied. Whichever way it was viewed, 'competing interest', not some primordial biological instinct, was ultimately found to be at the heart of the Niger Delta crisis.

Now, the idea that interest is a generator of conflict is not new amongst Niger Delta scholars. It can be found in the writings of such scholars as Obi (2009; 2010; 2011; 2014), Ikelegbe (2006), Omeje (2004; 2006), Adunbi (2015), Watts (2004; 2006), and Ako (2011), among many others. On the other hand, there is a paucity of work that successfully investigates the Niger Delta crisis with the specific objective of clarifying whether or not the regional conflict is being understood or interpreted from the point of view of primordialist theory – the idea that ethnic groups fight one another due to some ancient, firmly established, fixed and inflexible

differences based on biological descent or ancestry. Most Niger Delta scholars habitually work with the assumption that primordialism, as a framework for understanding the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation is already obsolete, but without bothering to verify this claim or assumption. This project is not satisfied with unverified assumptions and affirmations – for it is not impossible for there to exist proponents of a primordialist explanation of the Niger Delta conflict, just as was the case in the Rwanda and the Balkans during the 1990s and 2000s. This is why extra effort has been made in this thesis to explore this issue further, in order to reach a conclusion backed up by facts. Based on the data collected and examined, this project now announces with even greater confidence that there is currently nothing to suggest that the Niger Delta conflict is being understood or interpreted from a primordialist viewpoint. On the contrary, the idea that struggle over interests is at the heart of the regional conflict is sustained. This result reiterates what the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theory guiding the current research has always affirmed and upheld – the indispensability of interest in explaining why violent ethnic mobilisations occur and persist.

What may be observed from the foregoing is the apparent importance of the concept of 'interest', both for Kaufman and other interview respondents. A challenge that however remains at this juncture concerns the fact that there are multiplicity of ways in which the concept of interest may be understood (Benn, 1960; Schmitter, 2006). Given this, it is therefore worthwhile, I believe, to explore all the possible connotations of the concept of interest, and then clarify the exact sense in which it is understood and employed in the current project. The conceptual clarification will be followed by a more empirical phase that examines some specific contexts of violent conflict in the Niger Delta in order to demonstrate that 'interest' has actually played a role in the spiralling and persistence of violence.

In what consists the term 'interest'?

Given the centrality of the term 'interest' in Kaufman's theory of ethnic conflict, one would have expected him to provide an elaborate clarification of the concept; but he did not. It seems he presumed it to be a commonly used term with which the average English speaker is familiar, and which therefore did not need to be explained. Whatever be the case, given that the term itself is susceptible to a multiplicity of connotations, as Benn (1960), Wall (1975), Benditt (1979), Schmitter (2006) and Meissner (2015) observe, there is therefore a need to define the

way the term interest is understood and employed in this project. This gap (in Kaufman's work) is in no sense trivial, which is why I attempt to fill it below.

Much has been written about the definition of the concept of 'interest group', but when it comes to the definition of the term 'interest' per se, only a few scholars, including Benn (1960), Wall (1975), Benditt (1979), and Schmitter (2006), have devoted sufficient time and space to its elaboration and analyses. My elucidation of this concept draws extensively on the incredibly complex, but lucid definitions and clarifications provided by these scholars.

In the English language, Wall (1975) notes, there are basically three senses in which the term interest is used. The first is the sense in which one's 'interests' are those things or activities which one finds attractive, fascinating, or absorbing, and which one may be inclined to pursue just for their own sake. Circularly put, interest is that which an individual finds interesting. A good instance of this might be a person's hobbies. The second sense views interest as a 'good or advantage'. To say that something is in one's interest is tantamount to saying that it is for one's good, advantage or benefit. The term interest used in this sense is evaluative, implying that it could be used to denote and commend things that are valuable either in themselves or as a means to other valuable or beneficial things or conditions. Other uses of the term to signify investments, stakes, and interest groups, are all, according to Wall (1975) derived from this second basic sense. If acting in a specific manner would be to one's advantage, then it would be correct to hold that the said action is in that person's interest. 'In one's interest', according to the second sense explained here, simply means 'conducive to one's good or advantage'. In its third sense 'interest' simply means money paid for the loan of money.

A careful evaluation of Kaufman's theory of ethnic conflict reveals that his use of the term 'interest' is in line with the second basic sense described above. This second understanding also corresponds to the sense in which my interviewees employed the term. So, in the context of this investigation in the Niger Delta, the concept of interest is to be understood and employed in accordance with Wall's second description of the term to denote goods, benefits or advantages that can be derived, by either an individual or a group, from engagement in the Niger Delta's violent conflict. Accordingly, private interests shall therefore refer to the benefits that accrue to a section of the public, while public or general interest shall be used to refer to those goods that are to the advantage of all (the whole), not a just a section of it. Whether on a private or public scale, the term interest, in the manner that is employed in this research, simply means 'good, benefit or advantage'.

Having said this, it is also worth mentioning that in concrete existential situations, determining when an interest may be said to exist is not an easy task, yet being able to establish whether or not this is the case in any given socio-political situation is of utmost importance for the assessment and analyses of peoples' politically relevant choices and actions.

Regarding how best to determine whether or not an interest exists, two competing tendencies are often recognised: *normative* and *naturalistic* tendencies (Benn1960). According to the first tendency, the interest of an individual or group may be established by simply accepting what they have conscientiously and overtly declared their interest to be; that is, their publicly declared norms or intentions. There is however a difficulty associated with this view. It is not uncommon to encounter scenarios in which an individual's or group's actions blatantly deviate from, or entirely contradict what they say their interest is. In the case of Niger Delta for instance, there is hardly any government administration in Nigeria, at least since 1999, that has not overtly declared its interest in resolving the problem of violent mobilisation in the region as a matter of urgency and of general interest. However, some of their policy choices and actions have often suggested otherwise - leaving the public in doubt as to whether the government ever genuinely had an interest in resolving the regional crisis. Excessive use of military force in the region is a case in point. Here there seems to be a disjuncture between objective interest (what would be done) and actual interest (what is being done). It is for reasons such as this that the naturalist or behaviourist have arisen in opposition asserting that the interest of an individual or group cannot be known except through their actions - what is done and promoted (Plamenatz 1954: 1-8). Hence the need to focus on the actual activities of an individual or group and infer from those what their real interests are. For scholars of this naturalistic or behaviourist tendency, interest is to be inferred from what an individual or group (an organisation *formally* acting through its officials) does and insists on, and not vice versa. Proponents of this perspective belong to the second leaning: naturalistic or behaviourist tendency.

Even with its merits, the behaviourist approach is certainly not without some flaws. Making verifiable activities or actions the sole determinant of interest is a bit too narrow, for it precludes the possibility that individuals or groups could, and do occasionally, act out of sheer altruism, and not with some preconceived interests or benefits in view. In real life, people are not always subjecting their actions to rigorous, challenging and lengthy processes of evaluating the costs and benefits of the choices they make and act on. In view of this, it is reasonable to hold that

not every action is an expression of interest. So, the question 'what then is interest?' still remains.

Another weakness for which the naturalistic view is criticised lies in its inability to discern the complex connections between actions and interest. When considered in isolation, the place or role of certain actions aimed at actualizing a particular interest may be easily misunderstood. Superficially, certain choices or actions may appear to contradict or be contrary to an overtly acclaimed interest of a group or individual. However, when examined within the larger scheme of things, such choices or actions may turn out to be a part of a complex web of efforts towards the realisation of an averred interest. It is in recognition of this complexity that Schmitter has opted for a more encompassing understanding of interest as 'complex calculations involving careful specification of one's factual and counterfactual alternatives, weighted consideration of one's probable cost and consequences, lengthy assessment of one's probable cost and consequence, lengthy assessment of one's possible future opportunities, enhanced or foreclosed, and pondered clarification of one's order of preferences' (Schmitter 2006: 299).

Interest ought therefore not to be seen as a once and for all rational conversion of wants or preferences into appropriate actions or behaviours, but rather as a multi-sequential, iterative, and continuous social process. It involves a repeated set of interrelated calculations and transformations that leads from needs, to interests, action, associability. But for this process to come full cycle, concerned actors have to be able to carefully analyse a situation and identify what is at stake. It is only after concluding that what is at stake is realizable and desirable does the problem of interest move to the stage of concern, actions, and formation of an association that pursues and promotes the said interest. Overall, if what is at stake has not been properly identified, articulated, strategically and repeatedly pursued, then one cannot really speak of interest. For interest is more than just a mere desire or want.

This conception of interest, unlike that of the behaviourists, rejects the view that actions alone should be the sole determinant of interests, and upholds rather that a combination of both the naturalistic and normative tendential understandings of interest, not one in isolation of the other, is a better alternative. And this is the 'interest-determining' strategy preferred in this research.

Having enabled a clear understanding of the term interest and clarified how it will be employed in the context of this research, the next section aims to identify the possible interests that underpin violent ethnic mobilisations in the Niger Delta region.

Towards Identifying the Interests that Underpin Violent Confrontations in the Niger Delta

Violent ethnic confrontation in the Niger Delta region is a very complex phenomenon. This complexity is often captured and made evident in scholarly and policy-making attempts to explain the escalation and persistence of violent conflict in the region. Among the causal factors blamed for this regional turmoil are poverty, lack of infrastructure, political and economic marginalisation, exclusion, and corruption (Salawu, 2010). In the course of my field work, I observed that most of my interviewees still considered these factors to be the key drivers of conflict in the region. Although one could reasonably visualise ways that these factors contribute causally to violent conflict in the region, I noted that over-emphasis on them is a bit misleading – and obscures the more fundamental stake or interest that underpins the entire conflict, namely oil (and its associated benefits). Oil, in my opinion, is the independent variable in reference to which the contributions or roles of the often-touted causal factors outlined above in the Niger Delta conflict may be understood and explained. Pretending for a moment that poverty, economic marginalisation, lack of infrastructure, corruption amongst other causal factors mentioned above are the real reasons for violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta it can be seen that these factors are also present in many other regions, and amongst many other ethnic minority groups in Nigeria; yet, organised and persistent ethnic violence has never been experienced in any of those communities on the scale and intensity with which it occurs in the Niger Delta region, primarily because there are at the moment no exceptionally valuable lootable resources (interest), such as oil to justify engaging in violence. So, beyond these often-mentioned multiple causal factors, there is another more potent and fundamental driver of the Niger Delta conflict - oil. The more elaborate insight into the phenomenon of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta that follows shortly will be helpful in the portrayal of how oil wealth (rather than other factors often referred to such as poverty, marginalisation, corruption, etc.), is in fact the most fundamental stake that drives the ***contemporary*** violent agitation in the Niger Delta.

I have purposely used the term *contemporary* as a way of distinguishing between the sorts of politically salient violent conflict that existed in the Niger Delta region prior to, and after the discovery of commercial quantities of oil in the region. The interests or stakes that inspired and drove conflict during both periods are different, so I have decided to identify them in two different, but related sections. First, I discuss the pre-oil era violent conflict in the Niger Delta region, and thereafter treat what may be considered as the oil era conflict. In all these considerations, my overarching aim is to identify, in keeping with my theoretical framework, the interests or stakes in each era.

Interests and Conflict in the Pre-Oil Era of the Niger Delta Region

There is a wide-spread misconception that conflict in the Niger Delta are a recent development. Sometimes, individuals who examine the phenomenon of violent mobilisation in the region solely from the purview of its (the conflict's) relationship with petroleum resources, fall victim to this pervasive but misleading belief that there was no conflict in the Niger Delta before the discovery of crude oil. For instance, two of the young MPs interviewed during my fieldwork appeared to have little knowledge of the historical antecedents of the Niger Delta conflict. For them, it is all related to agitations over who controls the oil wealth and there is no doubt that this is the main stake in the contemporary violent agitations. But in order to appreciate the nature and complexity of these conflict, one ought to pay attention, as Ogbogbo (1995) argues, to earlier tales about the Niger Delta people and their environment, and how they have responded to some of the common challenges they faced.

From the writings of Ikime (1969; 1981), Alagoa (1980), and Ogbogbo (2005; 2008), among others with serious intellectual enthusiasm for the history of the Niger Delta people, one learns that violent conflict in the region predates the discovery of crude oil in a commercial quantity. Ogbogbo (2005: 2) points out that the Niger Delta people has "a well-documented tradition of nationalism and resistance against attempts by people foreign to the region to control the resources of the region". A close examination of this assertion reveals something profound and pertinent. His employment of the term 'nationalism' for instance, clearly suggests that the peoples of the Niger Delta region have always had a consciousness of themselves as a people or nation with interests to be protected – which is exactly why (as Ogbogbo notes), any attempt by foreigners either to dispossess or to alienate them from these resources (interests) was met with resistance. Furthermore, implicit in the notion of resistance as used by Ogbogbo is the

idea of conflict; for there is no need to speak of resistance in the absence of tensions or conflict. All these are compelling indications that there existed some conflict over interests in the region well before the discovery of crude oil in the region. A question thus arises here concerning the identification of the sorts of interests or stakes over which parties clashed in the Niger Delta's pre-oil era.

According to Ogbogbo (1993; 1995), apart from minor natural resources such as arable lands and fishing water bodies, the main resource, or more appropriately speaking, the greatest interest, that the Niger Deltans sought to protect in the pre-oil era of the Niger Delta was the region's *strategic geographical location* along the West African coastline. To adequately comprehend the significance (mostly economic) of the region's strategic geographical location, a reference needs to be made to the Portuguese exploration and trading activities on this coastline in the first half of the 15th century. These activities gradually opened up West African territorial waters to European international commerce. Between the 15th and 19th centuries, the region became famous as a commercial hub and a gateway to some of the West African interior markets, and the people of the Niger Delta played vital roles in these economic and trading activities, mostly as middle-men connecting European traders on the coastline with Nigerians in the hinterland.

Their function as middlemen, Ogbogbo (1995) contends, made the indigenes and inhabitants of Niger Delta key players in the economic affairs of the Nigeria for centuries to come. This immensely rewarding economic role constituted a valuable 'interest' that Niger Deltans worked zealously to protect – a treasure that originates from the region's accidental geographical positioning on the coast of West-Africa. In his work *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, Dike (1956: 19) affirms that 'it was as navigable waters that the rivers of the Niger Delta became so important in the economic history of modern Nigeria', to the point of actually being analogously described as the Venice of Africa.

From the foregoing, it emerges clearly that for the people and the inhabitants of the Niger Delta, the strategic geographical location they occupied was the mainstay of their economy, and *ipso-facto* their greatest interest, one they were always poised to protect. Quite frankly, there is nothing particularly bizarre or novel about this situation. More frequently than is thought, people's geographical locations have become a huge source of revenue, and by that very fact, an important and enviable asset or interest to be protected. Great Britain for instance still effectively guards its waters due primarily to their associated economic and security

advantages. Any attempt by foreigners to tamper with these vintage national zones usually triggers tensions, which, if not properly managed, can spiral into full blown violent conflict. The swift reaction of the British Navy during a Russian incursion into British territorial waters in 2018 is a good case in point. The British Naval authorities acted immediately to ward off this uninvited guest, because its territorial waters are without doubt, among the country's most valued assets, in terms of economy, security and sport. It is an interest they are always eager to protect. The unbending determination of the Niger Deltans, during the pre-oil epoch, to protect both their coast and the pivotal role they played as middle-men resulted in a number of violent clashes during the era of the violent European invasion of West Africa. All the well-known violent confrontations in the Niger Delta during this period (including clashes between the British colonialists and the following traditional rulers: Jaja of Opobo, Koko of Nembe, and Nana Olomu), were fought over interests - economic and political alike.

The objective of the discussion above is not to provide an elaborate and systematically structured discussion of the horrors of the European or colonial invasion of West Africa, but rather to establish that Kaufman (2001), whose theory of ethnic violence is being used in this thesis, is right to suggest that violent conflict, ethnic or otherwise, are always articulated around some sort of interest (real or perceived). In the pre-oil era of the Niger Delta region, most of the politically salient violent ethnic conflict were organised and fought around an important interest - benefits accruing from the strategic geographic location of the region along Africa's west coast. The clash was mainly between Europeans and the indigenes/ inhabitants of the Niger Delta.

Apart from this, Obaro Ikime, Alagoa, and Ogbogbo also recognise that prior to the arrival of European traders and colonialists, there were some violent internal conflict amongst the people of the Niger Delta themselves over fishing rights, ownership of farmlands, and aspects of cultural life. However, I have chosen not to emphasise these, because such conflicts were not peculiar to the Niger Delta region. They existed, and to some extent still do, in many other regions of Nigeria. But in order to bring out the peculiarity of the violent conflict in the Niger Delta during the period under review, it is reasonable to limit the discussion to distinctive conflicts, not those that are co-extensive with many other regions of Nigeria. The violent clashes between the colonialists and the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region over the control of its strategic and economically rewarding coastlines is certainly one such bespoke violent conflict in the history of Nigeria.

With the brutal advancement and entrenchment of the colonial agenda, the people of the Niger Delta were overpowered and consequently lost control of their territory as well as the dominant and immensely rewarding economic position of middle-men. This weakened the region's capacity to generate enough revenue on its own and significantly reduced its ability to provide basic amenities for its people. Consequently it became hugely dependent on the colonial state for survival. Some Africanist scholars such as Berman (2008) and Thomson (2011) suggest that the sequestration of the resources and valuable interests of the colonised people was a recurrent pattern in the colonialist's operations in Africa, which was evident in the Niger Delta region's encounter with the colonial powers.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that prior to the discovery of oil the Niger Delta region had witnessed some degree of violent conflict articulated around such interests as fishponds, farmlands, and most obviously the region's strategic location on the West African coastal waters. Thus the widely held belief of certain modern Nigerians with limited knowledge of the history of Niger Delta (that the region had always been a peaceful zone until the discovery of oil and gas), is not correct. Yet among my respondents were two young members of parliament who held that view.

Having identified the main stakes in the pre-oil era violent conflicts in the Niger Delta, the next section considers the issue of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta since the discovery of large quantities of oil and gas. The main preoccupation of the section is to demonstrate how oil (and its associated benefits) has become the new interest around which the contemporary violent conflicts in the Niger Delta revolve.

Interests and Conflict in the Oil and Gas Era of the Niger Delta Region

The Nigerian economy is hugely reliant on oil. According to Faleti (2013), Kew and Philips (2007) and UNDP (2006) oil accounts for over 90 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings, and over 80 percent of its total revenue. Because it is the region from which Nigeria's oil derives, the Niger Delta is indisputably the most important contributor to the wealth of the entire 'nation'. Despite this obvious fact, the region still remains one of the most impoverished areas of the country, lacking in basic necessities of life such as infrastructure, and basic health and social amenities. In an effort to make sense of this unsettling paradox, this research focused

its attention not just on the explanations provided by professional analysts, but also on the opinions of the Niger Delta's indigenous elites whom I interviewed during my fieldwork.

Elite views on why the region has remained so impoverished are very similar; however, the response of one – a traditional ruler – was more articulate and clear, and was very representative of other responses. His thoughts go thus:

> *The Nigerian government has constantly neglected this area due to its minority status. This neglect has caused poverty to thrive. The people have become frustrated and angry. They now want to take back control of their land. (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria; May 2017)*

Although his response seems quite simple and straightforward, it is in fact a rather complex one that needs to be unpacked. In this answer, a causal link is drawn between government negligence, poverty, and violent agitation in the region. The Niger Delta's minority status is also identified as a major reason for government's audacity to neglect, marginalise or become entirely nonchalant towards the region. In other words, had the region been of a majority ethnic group, the reverse would have been the case. To better appreciate this argument about minority versus majority statuses, it is necessary to say something about ethnic configuration in Nigeria.

Nigeria is huge country with over 400 identifiable ethnic groups (Salawu 2010). Of all these, however, only three are considered major, namely: Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. The rest, including the territories that collectively make up the area designated as the Niger Delta region, are all regarded as minority ethnic groups. In Nigeria, just as in many parts of the world, having a minority status can sometimes mean that one's views are not taken seriously in decision-making processes, especially as democratic decisions are usually made on the basis of majority votes. This is why democracy often comes across as the tyranny of the majority (Tocqueville, 1835), rather than the government of the people, by and for the , as described by Lincoln (1863). In no other place is this tyranny of the majority more obvious than in Nigeria where the majority ethnic groups are frequently accused by the Niger Deltans of leveraging their numerical strength to unfairly appropriate and redistribute the oil-based wealth from the Niger Delta without making sufficient effort to address the issue of underdevelopment, poverty and the associated violent agitations in the region. While this thesis agrees with Emeseh (2010) that violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta is a regional reaction to what is perceived as the injustice of the Nigerian government (which according to some of my interviewees is an

apparatus instrumentalised by the majority ethnic groups for their selfish ethnic agendas), it should be mentioned that behind the Niger Delta's clamour for justice lies a real interest, that is, the desire to be given fair consideration in the distribution of the wealth that is derived primarily from oil extracted in their region. Thus it appears that violence in the Niger Delta, in the manner and scale at which it currently occurs, would not exist if oil were not present in the region. This may appear to be a bold assertion. However, it has not been made without careful consideration the pattern of civil conflict among other minority ethnic groups. Studies have shown that although poverty, unemployment, lack of basic health and social amenities (among other factors), for which the Niger Deltans violently agitate, exist amongst other minority ethnic groups in Nigeria, large scale, sustained violent confrontations of the type experienced in the Niger Delta, do not occur. This is primarily because they do not possess highly valuable and lootable resources of interest such as oil. As Kaufman (2001) observes, people do not engage in organised violent conflict unless there is some sort of interest at stake. In the case of the Niger Delta, oil wealth is clearly the bone of contention (interest). The prevailing debate in Nigeria over 'resource control' is a good example, that further illuminates and strengthens this argument. This debate is examined below and provides useful insight into how violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta is constructed around interest in oil wealth.

The Resource Control Debate in the Niger Delta

Resource control, which according to Ako (2011) is at the heart of the Niger Delta violence, could be broadly defined as a politico-economic arrangement that allows the constituent states of the Nigerian Federation the autonomy to control and manage the resources within its geographic territory while making stipulated contributions to central government to fund federal responsibilities (Dafinone 2001; Ako 2011; Kehind *et al* 2013). Adesopo and Asaju (2004) note that the practice of resource control is in line with true federalism. Officially, Nigeria is a federal state, and as such should not have difficulties assenting to the Niger Delta's demand for resource control. However, the available evidence does not suggest that the Nigerian state supports the idea of resource control, in which the people of the Niger Delta would be allowed to take full charge and control of the region's oil and gas resources, even if this is in line with the principles and prescriptions of true and functional federalism. This explains why the resource control debate and its associated agitations have lingered for over a decade now. The question is why the Nigerian state is so resistant to the demand for resource

control? I shall return to this question later. The next section, however, rapidly traces the history of the resource control agitations in the Niger Delta to try to discern their underlying motif or rationale behind it. Mere grievances or interests? This will become clear in the following pages.

For a clearer presentation of the resource control narrative, it is necessary to discuss it in the wider context of the socio-political events that triggered the Adaka Boro led rebellion – an uprising often regarded by historians as the earliest resource control related violent agitation (Ogbogbo 2008; Ako 2011).

Nigeria secured its political independence from Great Britain in 1960. For the minority ethnic groups, especially those of the Niger Delta, the years leading up to this event were filled with ambivalence. While the majority ethnic groups prepared for and anticipated the formal end of colonial rule with excitement, ethnic minority groups on the other hand, especially the people of the Niger Delta, expressed fears over the possibility of being dominated and marginalised by their 'numerically more powerful' neighbours in post-independence Nigeria. In reaction to the concerns raised by the minority groups, the then colonial administration set up a special commission of enquiry. The Willink's Commission of 1958 was charged with the task of investigating the basis for these minority fears and make recommendations for allaying them. The outcome of the Willink's commission's inquiry revealed that these fears were grounded in two main issues. The first, as already hinted above, was a fear of domination in post-independence Nigeria. The second was the need to pay special attention to the unique developmental challenges facing the region. Niger Delta area is an extraordinarily swampy environment. Because of this, the cost of road construction and other infrastructural development is three times as high as other regions of Nigeria; the region's own internally generated revenue was not sufficient to address these environmental challenges. For this reason, they requested a higher allocation of funds to enable them to address these significant challenges.

At the end of its enquiry, the Willink's commission ruled that these concerns or fears, expressed by the ethnic minority groups of the Niger Delta, were legitimate, and that protecting them from possible domination, as well as allocating funds to enable them to tackle the unique environmental challenges confronting them, were reasonable, fair and necessary actions. Consequently, the commission recommended the creation of a federally funded board: NNDC (Niger Delta Development Commission) which would be charged with the responsibility of

addressing the specific environmental and developmental challenges confronting the region. This recommendation was accepted and the NNDC board was created and formally recognised by the constitution. Furthermore, on the issue of Niger Delta's fear of possible domination by the majority ethnic groups in post-independence Nigeria, the commission again recommended that a constitutional provision be made for the protection of the fundamental human rights and liberties of every Nigerian. This, it was expected, would guard against the domination, marginalisation and infringement of the rights of every Nigerian, irrespective of the ethnicity, major or minor, to which anyone belonged.

On the surface, the concerns expressed by the Niger Deltans may appear to have been addressed, especially as the government had not only recognised them as legitimate, but also made some constitutional provisions aimed at addressing them. However, this protective framework existed only in principle. In reality the political will to implement the recommendations of the Willink's commission, now constitutionally recognised, was still lacking. With the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region in 1958, and with the region becoming the greatest contributor to the national economy, thanks to the large oil reserves discovered in the region, the indigenes and inhabitants of the Niger Delta hoped for a better life and rapid infrastructural development. But this did not happen. The regional wealth was rather diverted towards the development of other parts of the country. Compared to most parts of the country, especially those belonging to the majority ethnic groups, the Niger Delta region still lags behind in terms of basic infrastructure, health and social amenities. Not much has changed since the time when the region first expressed their concerns to the Willink's commission. During my fieldwork there, I experienced first-hand the poor and near-dilapidated state of its roads and infrastructures. The University of Bristol's ethics committee, relying on information provided by the UK Home Office, also warned me about the poor state of the roads, as well as the dangers posed by floods in the region. I have mentioned this in order to highlight that the poverty and underdevelopment is real.

Grievances over decades of marginalisation, exclusion, neglect, and environmental degradation by oil companies reached a tipping point - compelling the Niger Deltans to mobilise against the government. They subsequently demanded to be allowed to take back control of both their environment and resources.

The earliest form of resource control related violent ethnic mobilisation in the post-colonial Nigeria was that led by Adaka Boro, an indigene of the Niger Delta, in 1966. Boro's armed

insurrection against the Nigerian government may best be described as a secessionist attempt, for it was aimed at breaking the region away from the rest of the country under the pretext of self-determination. The logic of Boro's revolution is quite straightforward: the Niger Delta, he believed, would be better off as an independent state than remaining a part of Nigeria, a country which he thought marginalised and treated it unfairly. The Boro led revolution lasted only for 12 days before it was confronted and quelled by a more powerful federal force (Ako, 2011; Faleti, 2013). But why did the Nigerian government find it necessary to resist the Niger Delta's attempt at secession? One would have expected that if a collection of people in an unhealthy and tumultuous cohabitation with its neighbours desired, in the interest of peace, to separate and form a separate nation, they should be allowed to do so. After all, Gellner (1990), one of the finest scholars of nationalism, proposed that states tend to have less violent frictions when their political and national boundaries are congruent. A part of the reason why Western European countries seem to enjoy a significantly higher level of intra-state peace is perhaps because political boundaries have not been arbitrarily drawn. They have rather been made to coincide as much as possible with national boundaries, even if this significantly reduced the population of some of the independent European states. Liechtenstein for instance has a population of about 40,000 people; Monaco 38,500; Iceland 334,250; Andorra 77,280; and Luxembourg 583,000; and the list could get longer. These territories have become independent states not because of size of their population, but mainly because ethno-national units were taken as the main determinant of political boundaries. The relatively stable intra-state peace enjoyed by most of these states may be partly explained by the congruence of both their national and political boundaries. In contrast, the Niger Delta region has a total population of approximately 30 million (Okonta and Douglas, 2003). Based on the European example, each of the constituent states of the Niger Delta could easily form an independent country without much difficulty. If Nigeria is disallowing the Niger Delta's push for session and self-determination, it is most probably because of the interests or benefits it derives from it. As mentioned earlier, the oil in the Niger Delta constitutes up to over 90 percent of Nigeria's internally generated revenues and foreign exchange earnings. Allowing the Niger Delta to secede would definitely have dire consequences for Nigeria. A country that suddenly loses up to 90 percent of its source of income would have great difficulty surviving. It can thus be seen that interest in oil wealth was at the centre of Adaka Boro's violent confrontation with the federal government of Nigeria. It was therefore no surprise when barely three years after Boro's revolution had been foiled, the federal government of Nigeria enacted the 'petroleum act' of 1969; and much later, the 'land use act' of 1978. These two pieces of legislation formally vested

the ownership and control of oil and gas deposits anywhere in the country in the federal government and not in the regional government. Although the Niger Deltans were against this move, that ignored their interests and systematically alienated them ownership and control of resources that derived directly from their homeland, no other formidable collective action had been taken since the time of Boro's revolution to challenge this decision until the 1990s.

From 1990s onwards, what may rightly be referred to as the second wave of the Niger Delta's resource control agitation commenced. It is not entirely clear why, after the quelling of the Boro led armed insurrection, no other seriously organised armed confrontation of the Federal government occurred until the 1990s. Perhaps it was due to the fact that for most of those years, unelected military dictators were in power. The unilateral system of government they ran emboldened them to brutally punish whoever challenged their policies, sometimes even lethally. But again, this assumption is not very satisfactory, because in the year 1990 when Ken Saro Wiwa, a human rights activist from the Niger Delta, led what may be considered one of the most potent protests and demanded justice for the region (particularly for the 'Ogoni land' - his home town), the military dictators were still in power. So, it remains difficult to understand why there was an interval of twenty-four years before another organised insurrection occurred. Perhaps this is why Ogbogbo (2007; 2008) referred to it as a 'preparatory phase' of the Niger Delta crisis. Although Ken Saro Wiwa and his colleagues were eventually murdered (hanged) by the military regime of General Sani Abacha, Saro Wiwa and his colleagues achieved a significant feat. They were able to articulate, for the first time, the grievances of their people through the 'Ogoni Bill of Rights', which they drafted in August 1990 (Faleti 2013). Moreover, they formed the Movement for the Emancipation of Ogoni People (MOSSOP) to champion this cause. The death of Saro Wiwa and his nine colleagues did not deter the Niger Deltans' continual push for justice. It rather heightened their resistance and led to the formation of more violent ethnic militias in the region who demanded either secession or control of the region's resources. From fieldwork experiences in the region, I can confirm that there is still a very strong feeling of anger and resentment amongst the ordinary people of the Niger Delta regarding what they consider an unjust alienation of their resources. One of my interviewees told me: 'Nigeria should all break up. To your tents oh Israel' (Interview response by a Member of Bayelsa state House of Assembly in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State Nigeria; June 2017). From this, there is no doubt that resource control agitation and debate are still very much alive in the Niger Delta.

The narrative above has been presented, not just as a way of recapitulating some historical facts about the Niger Delta, but mainly to establish that at the basis of all these violent conflicts in the Niger Delta lies some real interest: access to and control of oil wealth. It is therefore not an over-statement to posit that interest, as Kaufman (2001), and Collier and Hoeffler (2000) observe, is an indispensable factor in accounting for why violent ethnic mobilisation occurs and persists in the Niger Delta region.

Apart from the confrontation between the Federal government of Nigeria and the Niger Deltans over resource control, another dimension of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta region is that between the indigenes and the oil companies. This will be examined in the next section again with a view to establishing whether or not interests have played a role in the generation and sustenance of the violent conflicts in the Niger Delta.

Interests and Conflict in the Niger/Delta: Multinational Oil Companies versus the Niger Delta Indigenes

The damaging impact of oil exploration on the environment

The Niger Delta is host to some of the world's top oil companies. Among those operating actively in the region are Royal Dutch Shell (British/Dutch), Chevron (American), Agip (Italian), Exxon Mobil (American), and Total (French), amongst others. Over the years, oil companies operating in the Niger Delta have been accused of recklessness and utter disregard for basic business ethics in their operations. The principles of business ethics require, for instance, the integration of best practice in business affairs in order to eliminate, or at least minimise the negative impacts of for-profit ventures both on human beings and the ecosystem in general. Viewed from this perspective, there is no doubt that multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta are seriously wanting, particularly in terms of the choices they make in their operations within the region. Their lack of will and enthusiasm to employ modern technologies and best practices in the exploitation of oil and gas in the Niger Delta region has led to major oil spillages and gas flares. Shell once admitted that most of their equipment was constructed in the 1960s and early 1980s. Although these facilities were built in line with the standards then prevailing, they now fall below the recommended standard for less environmentally

hazardous oil exploitation. Shell now recognises that this equipment would have been constructed differently today (Shell, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1999; Agunobi et al. 2014).

There is a consensus among experts that huge amounts of oil are spilled in the region, although estimates of the exact volume vary. Between 1976 and 1996, Nigeria's Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) estimated that a volume of 1.89 million barrels of oil was spilled in the Niger Delta region (Vidal, 2010). A UNDP report on oil spillage in the Niger Delta states that over 300 million barrels of oil have been spilled in the region between 1976 and 2001, of which only 30 percent was recovered, and 70 percent lost (UNDP, 2006). The Nigerian National Petroleum Commission (NNPC) pegs the volume of oil spilled at 320 cubic meters in 300 oil spillage incidents (Manby, 1999). A World Bank report by Moffat and Linden (1995) on the issue of oil spillage in the region casts doubt on figures previously published by government departments, arguing that oil spills in the region could be ten times higher than the so-called official statistics or figures. Vidal (2010)'s investigation on the issue of oil spillage reaffirms that it is impossible to establish the exact amount of oil spilled in the region, because both the government and the oil companies try as much as possible to keep such incidents secret. Whatever the statistics are, it obvious that oil spillage in the Niger Delta region is of staggering proportions.

Niger Delta Indigenes confront oil companies

These incidents of oil spillage and gas flaring have consequently led to the destruction of vegetation, farms and fishing areas on which most of the local population depend for livelihood and survival. Frustrated, the indigenes and other inhabitants of the area have resorted to protests (violent, and otherwise), as well as forming militia groups, vandalizing oil facilities, and kidnappings, amongst other things, as a way of pressurizing the oil companies to properly compensate them for the environmental degradation which negatively impacts on their economic prospects and prosperity. In particular, the worst hit have been farmers and fisherman who can no longer successfully carry on their businesses due to polluted soil and water channels, for which the oil companies are to blame.

In 2003, Asari Dokubo, an indigene of the Niger Delta region founded a militia organisation called the NDPVF (Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force) whose main aim was to take back control of the petroleum resources in the region through oil bunkering. Oil bunkering is a

process of tapping and extracting oil from the pipelines for some clandestine market. In Nigeria, oil bunkering is considered illegal and a crime (Human Rights Watch, 2005). In 2004, Olusegun Obasanjo, the then president of Nigeria, commissioned a military operation to wipe out the activities of the NDPVF. The latter, however, countered the intended military operation by declaring 'all-out war' with both the Nigerian state and the oil companies, threatening to blow up pipelines and other oil facilities, and consequently disrupt oil production and distribution. That was in September 2004. It caused a major stir in the region. Two days later, Shell, one of the major multinational oil companies operating in the area evacuated 235 of its non-essential workers from the field, leading to the reduction of oil production (BBC news, 2004). For a country like Nigeria whose economy is heavily reliant on oil, the impact of this crisis was immediately felt.

In the last quarter of 2012, Nigeria experienced a significant increase in piracy activities off its coast. By early 2013, it had become the second most pirated country in Africa after Somalia. Between 2004 and 2006 a total number of 12 ships had been hijacked, 33 sailors kidnapped, and about 4 oil workers killed. According to a BBC report, a Niger Delta Militia organisation is thought to be behind those attacks. (BBC News, 2006). Since 2006, kidnapping oil workers and well to do Nigerian political elites or their relatives, mostly in exchange for money, has become the *modus operandi* of the Niger Delta militia organisations. By 2016, Uguru and Faul (2016) report, more than 200 foreigners had been abducted, but mostly released unharmed in exchange for a huge financial ransom. A more chronological account of the issues of kidnapping and hostage-taking in the Niger Delta may be found in publications by Cutler (2008); Uguru and Faul (2016); Renshaw *et al.* (2016).

To calm these violent agitations, and protect oil facilities from being further sabotaged, the multinational oil companies operating in the region devised a more informal means of tackling the problem, which entailed paying into a carefully negotiated compensatory fund in the oil-bearing communities which in turn was expected to watch over the oil rigs and facilities and prevent them from being further vandalised. Unfortunately, however, this attempted solution did not fully succeed as the formula for distributing the large amount of money made available to oil-bearing communities became a highly contested issue. So, rather than being a solution, the informal provision of compensatory funds by oil companies to the so-called oil producing communities introduced further complications to the conflict management and resolution

process by further generating some hitherto non-existent inter/intra communal or ethnic violent conflicts in which the Niger Delta people turned against one another.

In all this, there is no doubt that every party implicated in these conflicts has been pursuing some specific interest. For the oil companies, it was the desire to be allowed to carry on with the oil exploration activities that provided them with enormous benefits. That was their interest. The Niger Delta indigenes on the other hand had an interest in protecting their environment, especially because the latter provided them with a livelihood. This again is an 'interest' at stake in the conflict. Furthermore, when the Niger Deltans turned against one another, it was once again over interest in the compensatory funds provided by the oil companies. In all these conflicts, there has been some sort of interest at stake. This observation tallies with the position of the theoretical framework used in this thesis, which highlights among other things the indispensability of 'interest' in accounting for why violent ethnic conflicts occur and persist.

Interest and Inter/intra Communal Crisis in the Niger Delta

In her work 'Oil exploration and conflict in the Nigeria's Niger Delta', which focuses on the case of Ilaje community of the Niger Delta area, Abosade (2015), describes how the majority of post-independence intra/inter-ethnic violent confrontations in the Niger Delta arise primarily from competition over the distribution of the compensatory fund provided by the oil companies. Quite often, a segment of the community that feels unfairly treated in the allocation of the fund mobilises, sometimes violently, to challenge the *status quo* and seek its overturn. A case in point is that of the Ugbo or Ilaje crisis in which a couple of lives were lost.

Ugbo Kingdom comprises of two sub-communities: Mahin and Ugbo. Oil production takes place is Ugbo but not in Mahin. However, the official designation: 'oil producing community' refers to Ugbo Kingdom; that is, to both Mahin and Ugbo sub-communities. This implies that any compensation made to this oil producing community is destined for the entire community, not just a portion of it. Before the discovery of oil, the Ugbo kingdom functioned perfectly as one undivided entity. In times of war, all its constituent parts stood together as one to ward off external aggressors. The single identity shared by these sub-communities was never in question. However, with the discovery of oil and its associated benefits, cracks and divisions began to appear. The sharing of the compensatory funds routinely paid by Chevron (the oil

company operating in the locality) to Ugbo Kingdom, became the main issue in the conflict. Rather than compensating the entire oil producing community, Chevron decided to pay only the inhabitants of the oil producing area of Ugbo, and not Mahin. In doing this, Chevron brought division into the identity of a community that hitherto functioned as one. The exclusion of Mahin from the compensation formula caused them to revolt, often violently, against both the oil company and against their neighbouring sister community Ugbo.

It is important to notice the important role that 'interest' plays in the generation of conflict amongst the groups concerned. All the parties involved in the conflict have some kind of interest or benefits to pursue. The oil company was not keen to invest money in state-of-the-art oil exploitation technologies, even if these were clearly desirable for their ability to minimise oil spillage and other negative effects of oil exploration on the environment. Not investing in new technology saves them some cost; in other words, it is financially beneficial for them, but on the other hand, damaging for the Niger Delta and its environment. Again, paying compensation only to the oil producing area, and not to the entire community, is certainly more financially rewarding for the oil companies. It reduces the compensation pay-outs significantly. It is therefore in the interest of the oil company (Chevron) to take such a line.

From the case presented above, it is obvious that the conflict between Ugbo and Mahin sub-communities was over the compensation fund provided by the oil by Chevron. Prior to the discovery of oil in this Ugbo kingdom, there was nothing worth fighting for. But since the discovery of oil and its associated compensatory funds, violent agitations over the distribution of funds have become a regular occurrence. Without doubt, the compensatory funds constitute the interest or benefit over which these sister communities clash. Whichever way it is evaluated, interests or benefits play an important role in explaining the reasons for violent conflicts occur and persist in Ugbo kingdom; and by extension, in the Niger Delta region, since Ugbo kingdom is a part of the Niger Delta.

A similar instance of 'interest' driven intra-ethnic violence in the Niger Delta is that between the Torfani and Aberi people of Bayelsa state over the ownership of Aduku fishing community - a relatively culturally diverse location inhabited by people from other Nigerian ethnic groups such as the Igbo, Urhobo, and Isoko, mainly for fishing purposes. According to Sawyer (2014)'s investigation in the region, Aduku community is important for two main reasons: its fishing lake, and its large oil reserves. Prior to the discovery of oil in the location, Aduku was

a non-contested peaceful fishing area. However, with the discovery of oil, and consequently the negotiated rents paid directly to the oil-bearing communities by oil companies operating on site, Aduku community became a disputed territory over which the Trofani and Aberi people clash violently. My concern at this stage is not to determine the true owner of the disputed territory - a number of court cases have been filed to sort this out; but rather to highlight the role of interest in provoking a sustained and reprisal intra-ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta area. The discovery of oil in Aduku is in my opinion a real game changer. Peoples' interest in the benefits that oil brings obviously pushed the Aberi and Trofani peoples into violent conflict against one another.

Analyses of the root causes of violence both in Ugbo kingdom and in Aduku community supports Kaufman's theory that people do not engage in organised and sustained violent conflicts unless there is some sort of interest to be obtained. In the cases presented and examined above, interest in oil and its associated benefits, constitutes an indispensable factor in understanding and explaining the why violent conflicts occur and persist in these areas, and *ipso facto*, in the Niger Delta. Echoes from my fieldwork interviews in Bayelsa State of the Niger Delta region correspond to this Kaufmanian theoretical perspective which provides the framework within which the current research is conducted.

Conclusion

The term 'interest' is a major relevant concept in this research project. The fieldwork data obtained from the Niger Delta, as well as the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theoretical framework within which the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta is currently being examined highlight, amongst other factors, the indispensability of 'interest' in accounting for why violent ethnic conflicts evolve and persist. Kaufman's opinion that violent ethnic mobilisation cannot occur unless there is some sort of interest at stake has not only been clearly affirmed in one of his most influential works: *The Modern Hatreds* (2001), but also directly or indirectly alluded to in a series of other works he published thereafter – one indication of his unwavering conviction, along with the internal consistency that runs through his works on the subject of ethnic violence. His opinion, to say the least, is very tenable; for it is reasonable to hold that under normal circumstances, rational entities would not engage one another in a pre-meditated, organised and sustained violent confrontation unless there is some sort of interest, real or perceived, over which they clash. It is, in fact, very hard, if not altogether impossible, to conceive of any serious academic tradition or theory of ethnic violence/ war that

contradicts it. If there is any issue on which the proponents of constructivism (Bates 1974; 1983; 1997; Hechter 1986; 1995; Fearon 1994; Chandra 2004), instrumentalism (Duran 1974:43; Glazer and Moynihan 1979; Lonsdale 1992; Collier and Hoeffler 2001) and most certainly ethnosymbolism (Young 1976; Smith 1980, 1991; Connor 1994; Kaufman 2001, 2006) converge, it is most probably on the indispensability of interest in accounting for the emergence and persistence of ethnic violence. Even the interview participants interrogated on the phenomenon of ethnic violence during my fieldwork in the Niger Delta (although strictly speaking, not academic experts on the subject of ethnic violence), were able to recognise the necessary role of competing 'interest' in the evolution, occurrence and persistence of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta region. The responses they provided to the interview questions support, either directly or indirectly, the Kaufmanian stance on the indispensability of 'interest' in violent ethnic mobilisation.

The idea that interest is a generator of conflict is not new amongst Niger delta scholars. The notion is seen reflected in the writings of such scholars as Obi (2009; 2010; 2011; 2014), Ikelegbe (2006), Omeje (2004; 2006), Adunbi (2015), Watts (2004; 2006), and Ako (2011), among many others. On the other hand, there is a paucity of work that has investigated the Niger Delta crisis from the point of view of primordialism – the idea that ethnic groups fight one another due to some ancient, firmly established, fixed and inflexible differences based on biological descent or ancestry. Most Niger Delta scholars have worked with the assumption that primordialism as a framework for understanding the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation is already obsolete and currently not being used in the Niger Delta, but without bothering to verify this claim through a separate inquiry. This project is not satisfied with unverified assumptions and affirmations – for there could have been easily some proponents of a primordialist explanation of the Niger Delta conflict, just as was the case in the Rwanda and the Balkans during the 1990s and 2000s. It is for this reason that extra effort has been made in this thesis to explore this issue further, and reach a conclusion that is backed up by facts, rather than just by assumptions. Based on the data collected and examined, it is possible to state with confidence that there is currently nothing to suggest that the Niger Delta conflict is being understood or interpreted from a primordialist viewpoint. On the contrary, the idea that struggle over interests is at the heart of the regional conflict has been overwhelmingly sustained. This conclusion reiterates the views of both my interview respondents and Kaufman on this issue – the indispensability of interest in accounting for why violent ethnic mobilisations occur and persist.

CHAPTER 5

THE POSSIBLE ROLES OF ELITES IN THE SPIRALLING OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN THE NIGER DELTA

In Chapter Four, it became clear that interest, particularly oil wealth, is central to a meaningful explanation of the occurrence and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the contemporary Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Following Kaufman (2001) and the resource or economy-based theorists of ethnic violence, such as Collier and Hoeffler (2002), amongst others, the last chapter reached a firm conclusion that ethnic violence would in fact not occur in that region unless there was some sort of interest, perceived or imagined, at stake. Indeed, it is inconceivable that rational entities would aimlessly engage one another in premeditated and well-organised violent confrontations unless there were some rewarding objectives to be pursued. Interests are usually a reason to fight (Pandey 1992: 41; Horowitz 1998)

While this project recognises the indispensable role of interest in the rise and persistence of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta, it also acknowledges that there is nothing inherent in interests, or the pursuit thereof, that inevitably provokes large-scale ethnic violence. Historically, people have always pursued interests, either individually and collectively, without necessarily ending up in some sort of premeditated and organised violent confrontations (Esman, 2004). Given this, it is therefore reasonable to hold that interest, although necessary, is not automatically a sufficient condition for the occurrence and persistence of ethnic violence. There is always a need for some sort of agency (ethnic elites or entrepreneurs) through whom tensions over competing ethnic interests metamorphose or transform into full-blown ethnic violence. It is in this regard that the agency of manipulative elites in provoking and sustaining ethnic violence emerges as an indispensable supplement.

In the pages that follow, I will briefly revisit elite manipulation theory to enable a quick understanding of what it entails, as well as what my interview respondents thought of it, particularly in relation to the Niger Delta violent conflict. Thereafter, the context of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta is again reviewed in order to assess whether the elites (manipulative and corrupt) have played any role in the provocation and persistence of the violent regional crisis under review.

Elite Manipulation Theory Revisited

Elite manipulation theory, an offshoot of the instrumentalist perspective on ethnic violence, represents the dominant explanatory paradigm relative to the origins or causes of violent ethnic conflict. It holds that elites incite and instrumentalise ethnic violence for personal interests or gains (Snyder, 2000; Gagnon,1994; Brass 1997, Fearon and Laitin, 2000). Gagnon (1994) argued that 'violent conflict along ethnic cleavages is provoked by elites in order to create a domestic political context in which ethnicity is the only politically relevant identity', adding that

> *by constructing individual interest in terms of threat to the group, endangered elites can fend off domestic challengers who seek to mobilise the population against the status quo and better position themselves to deal with future challenges. (Gagnon, 1994:132)*

Kaufman (2001:5) later reiterated this position when he opined that leaders of ethnic communities provoke extreme ethnic violence or war in order to keep or grab powers or other egoistic benefits, real or perceived. Brass (1997:6-7), in his *Theft of an Idol*, presented the outcome of his investigation into the causes of reprisal violent ethnic riots in India in the same vein. He made the striking observation that incidents that precipitate violent riots often arise out of contexts that are not inherently of an ethnic or communal nature. However, the elevation of these specific events to take on a large-scale ethnic dimension depends on the local elites' attitudes to, and interpretation of such events. In other words, elites have the power to provoke violence or persuade for calm through their attitudes and interpretation of events. Brass's investigation therefore concluded that ethnic riots are, in the case of India, a utilitarian instrument, carefully constructed and employed by elites and those who control the flow of information - the media, in view of attaining some egoistic political ends (Brass 1997:61). Usually, the elites are conversion specialists who know how to keep tensions at a combustible level and effectively convert moments of tension into large-scale violent confrontation to achieve some preconceived private ends (Brass 1997:9).

Could the same be affirmed in the case of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta? Have elites played any roles in the spiralling and persistence of the crisis? If so, how were they able to do this successfully? Below are some of the responses provided by the individuals interviewed on the roles of the elites in the spiralling and persistence of the Niger Delta crisis, during my fieldwork.

Elites' Roles in the Niger Delta Violent Conflict: Views from Fieldwork interviews

In an effort to comprehend the possible roles of the elites in the provocation and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region, 16 interviewees were asked the following question during an in-depth qualitative interview conducted both in Rivers and Bayelsa states of the region under review: "Some have argued that if the elites wanted the crisis to cease, they would have been able to do it. But that they have not could be an indication that they themselves may be benefiting from the crisis. Do you think that it is the case that the elites have any interest in seeing the crisis end?". The responses they provided overwhelmingly suggest that they are aware that elites have been instrumental in the persistence of violent regional conflict.

For instance, a member of the State House of Assembly interviewed had this to say:

> *there is no doubt that the elites are stake holders in the conflict, and surely have had a role to play in the escalation of these conflicts with the Niger Delta. (Interview response by a Member of Bayelsa state House of Assembly in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State Nigeria; June 2017)*

The point being made here is that the elites are equally a part of the political 'class' who are entrusted with the real power (political and economic) to contain the regional crisis. Rather than doing so, they embezzle the public funds designated for solving the problem of violent conflict in the region. Hence the persistence of the regional crisis. It is against this background that the interviewee thought that elites have played some role in the occurrence and persistence of the Niger Delta violent conflict. Responding to the question of whether or not elites have contributed to the escalation of ethnic violence, another respondent – a traditional community ruler, told me: 'Well, the answer is yes'. He later added:

> *The political elites know who the militants are, and how they operate. In fact, they interact and collaborate with them. (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria; April 2017)*

Another interviewee's response to the same question was more explicit.

> *"Let us talk about those who currently own oil blocks in the region. They have money. They do not want the status quo to change. They want to continue to keep it …That is the situation. But the vast majority would fight against it. The common people would want the situation to change, but the elites, because of the benefits they get would want the status quo to remain, even if there is conflict. The people fight for change, but the elites strategically remain adamant to this request for change because it benefits*

them" (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria; May 2017).

All the other interviewees in some way reiterated, in different words, these opinions; they were unanimous in their conviction that elites have, and continue to, play some roles, especially through corruption and the embezzlement of public funds, in the occurrence and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta.

One element that did not quite come through in the interviews was the issue of the 'mechanism' of ethnic conflict. The respondents, a bit more like Brass (1997), did not explain the mechanism of violent ethnic mobilisation in the region; that is, how the elites actually stir the region's ethnic population to violence. Yet understanding the processes or mechanism by which ethnic tensions metamorphose into full blown violent ethnic confrontation is helpful, not only in comprehending the dynamics of this conflict, but also for the purpose of developing a bespoke conflict resolution model for the region. That the elites embezzle public funds does not quite explain this. Perhaps this issue might be resolved through examination of the triangulation and supplementary data, below.

Triangulation/Supplementary Data

To verify the information obtained from the interviews, I turned to other sources of primary data such as newspaper articles, television and print media interviews granted by ex-militants, politicians, statesmen, technocrats, traditional rulers, and youth leaders on the subject of elite manipulation and roles in the spiralling and persistence of the conflict. The outcome of my examination of these supplementary/triangulation documents reveals a unanimous conviction among all the data sources examined, that both the Nigerian and the indigenous Niger Delta elites have indeed been instrumental in the rise and persistence of the Niger Delta crisis; although the manner in which this fact was captured and communicated varies slightly from one source to another. Bibora Orubebe, for instance, acknowledges this when he says the following:

"The oil wealth, oil production in Niger Delta has only enriched multinational corporations and Nigerian federal leaders, some in military, others in civilian uniform. They have used the wealth to improve and develop themselves and other regions and neglected the actual people that produce" (TVC News, Nigeria, breakfast interview with Bibora Orubebe, secretary general of Ijaw national congress, July 16, 2016).

In this interview, Orubebe acknowledges that part of the problem faced in the Niger Delta is that Nigerian political elites and oil multinational companies cart away the oil wealth belonging to the region for their own personal interest, and that of their respective regions. This point had been captured earlier by Henry Okah, a Niger Delta ex-militant currently on trial in South Africa on criminal charges, when he was interviewed by Aljazeera News Agency. In his words:

> *Oil companies are on our land. If somebody comes on our land without our consent, it is our problem, that's our business to get rid of them. If somebody takes control of your house or your car, what you want is your car or house from him. And that's it. What we want from these oil companies is our land. And then they can sort it out with Nigerian government who permitted them to be on our lands against our wills. (Aljazeera's exclusive interview with Henry Okah, Nov 1, 2009)*

Henry Okah believes that the unhealthy alliance between the Federal Government and the oil company to forcibly explore oil in the region is a principal reason for the occurrence and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta. In the same interview, Mr. Okah threatened that if the Federal government did not start addressing the Niger Delta's demand for fair inclusion in resource distribution, the region would resume violent agitation once more:

> *I think in a few months, if the government doesn't start addressing the real demands of the people of Niger-Delta. If the government doesn't start speaking to the right people in addressing the real problems, there will be a resumption in violence. (Aljazeera's exclusive interview with Henry Okah, Nov 1, 2009)*

Ben Donyegha, interviewed by TVC News Nigeria, voiced another opinion on the causal role of elites in the Niger Delta conflict. When asked by the host if he had heard "about the complaint that some of the boys gave that they were not receiving some of these monies and they wanted direct conversation with the authorities, so that they can also have a sense of direction ?", his answer was simply "Yes.…" (Ben Donyegha, Interview with Channels Television Nigeria, on Developments in the Niger Delta, July 11, 2016). Anyone who has followed the causes of events in the Niger Delta would easily discern that this response, although brief, is loaded with meaning. It might be helpful to discuss this response in context. Among the pertinent issues that Adunbi (2015) discusses in his monograph are some of the measures taken by the Federal government to address the Niger Delta conflict. The presidential Amnesty programme is one of them. An important part of this programme is the agreement by the federal government to pay monthly stipends to the Niger Delta as a way of demobilising the combatants in that violent cause and reintegrate them back into the society. Huge sums of

money were earmarked for this purpose and entrusted to the Niger Delta elites for distribution. A significant portion of this fund was illegally diverted and mismanaged, and the purpose for which it was provided not fully attained. In this interview, Ben Donyegha acknowledges that this partly contributed to the persistence of the regional crisis. Ben Donyegha is a member of the central working committee of PANDEF which is the highest socio-cultural body of the Niger Delta people.

All the supplementary/triangulation documents examined confirm, in one way or another, the respondents' affirmations that corrupt elites have played some enabling roles in the spiralling and persistence of the Niger Delta conflict. This conclusion is also sustained in the work of many experts on the subject of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta, such as Ikelegbe(2006), Watts(2007), Obi *et al* (2011), Iwilade(2017), and Adumbi(2015) amongst others. Although these documents, as well as those of the above mentioned scholars, have done well in presenting compelling arguments that explain how grievances over the injustices perpetuated by the elites cause violence (this is an indirect and normal consequence of elite corruption as shall be seen in a later section), what they have however not done is to explore those circumstances in which manipulative elites have actively constructed and deliberately stirred up violent ethnic mobilisation, or explain the mechanism by which this occurred. How exactly were the elites (for instance in the case Adaka Boro led violent mobilisation) able to lead rational ethnic adults to actively get involved in violent ethnic conflict, sometimes even at the risk of their lives? Grievances, even when extreme, do not always end in violent conflict. But when they do, it is usually because some agency or leadership has caused it to occur. What therefore needs to be explained is the mechanism (or the process) by which ethnic grievances are transformed into organised violent ethnic mobilisation. This was neither well explained by the interviewees nor by the triangulation/supplementary materials used to verify them. The next section aims to address this gap.

A more comprehensive view of elite manipulation

A more balanced and comprehensive account of the elites' role in violent conflict may be seen in the works of Gurr (1994), Horowitz (2000) and Kaufman (2001) amongst others, who, although they acknowledge the indispensability of elites in provoking and sustaining ethnic violence, are equally clear that the success of elite manipulation is contingent on a number of other enabling elements which, as an ensemble, Kaufman (1998; 2001; 2006) refers to as *the*

pre-conditions for ethnic violence. In Kaufman's view, the elites would be incapable of mobilising rational adults to violence unless these pre-conditions were present – for these are like the raw materials, thanks to which manipulative elites are able to fabricate and maintain politically salient violent conflict for their own selfish interest. They are as follows***: hostile ethnic myths, fear, and political space***. Only in the light of these elements is one able to start making sense of how manipulative elites are able to impel an ethnic public to participate in an extreme violent conflict, even at the risk of their lives.

To successfully mobilise an ethnic population, or a portion of it, to ethnic violence, there needs to be, first, a ***hostile group mythology*** that justifies ethnic violence. This does not need to be an accurate or true narrative of events, but must, more than anything else, cast the ethnic opponents in negative light – presenting them as dangerous enemies to be wary of. The second factor is passion, or the emotion of ***fear***. The elites need to create in the people a real sense of collective or group fear. Ethnic appeals would successfully produce extreme violence if an ethnic group is anxious that its collective existence is at risk of being destroyed. Exploitative and manipulative elites know how to tap into ethnic fears to strategically cause extreme violence, using a purposefully constructed hostile ethnic myth. The third factor is political opportunity. In order for an ethnic group to mobilise without being repressed by the state, there also needs to be sufficient ***political space*** or opportunity. The opportunity referred to here is comprised of the following: the presence of a weak or broken state structure; the availability of independent funds that are not formally derived from the state, and finally a territorial base. Toft (2003) and Kaufman (2006) suggest that ethnic militia organisations cannot effectively and efficiently mobilise unless they are territorially concentrated in some regions, either within their own state or in neighbouring countries. All these conditions, it should be mentioned, cannot in and of themselves lead to ethnic violence. Another indispensable factor, namely a manipulative elite, is required for extreme ethnic violence to set in. Theoretically, elite manipulation entails a number of things simultaneously: a set of actors (elites) tapping into ***hostile ethnic myths*** and ***fear***, and leveraging the weakness or fragility of the state ***(political space)*** to strategically provoke violent ethnic conflict that they expect to benefit themselves. All these constitute what Kaufman calls the 'mechanism' of violent ethnic mobilisation. Each of these pre-conditions (ethnic myth, fear, and political space) are elaborated further below, in relation to the Niger Delta violent conflict. The aim is to show that these pre-conditions were already present in the Niger Delta, which explains why it was possible for manipulative elites

to creatively harness and use them to mobilise ethnic populations in the Niger Delta to violent conflict in which they (the elites), and not necessarily the people, stood to gain.

Hostile Ethnic Myth and the Niger Delta Conflict

The key issue examined and discussed here concerns the ability of hostile ethnic myths to inspire violent ethnic mobilisation.

Ethnic myth, from Greek *ethnos* (people) and *mythos* (story) may be broadly defined as a legendary or traditional narrative, with or without determinable factual or historical basis, that communicates about the origins, cosmology, customs, and practices of a people. Functionally, it provides a system whereby an ethnic group's contemporary attitudes and actions are ordered and validated (Calhoun, 2002; Darvill, 2009; Baldick, 2015; Vivanco, 2018). West (2003) adds that myths are essential in providing the continuity that people need for collective ethnic or nationalist actions. According to Anthony Smith (1984), myth plays an important role in nourishing the sense of ethnic identity and mobilising ethnic communities for political action. In myths, the identity and "history" of ethnic communities are captured, communicated and perpetuated. It does not matter whether a myth is accurate. What matters is that it exists, and that ethnic groups and nations refer to it in an effort to explain their origin and history and validate their actions.

Nigeria, somewhat like the United states of America, is composed of many states (36 in total), with each state having an executive governor who runs its affairs largely independently of the federal government's intervention. The Niger Delta region is comprised of 9 of these states, namely, Abia, Imo, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Bayelsa, Ondo, Edo, Delta, Rivers. However, these states are not ethnically homogenous, for within each exists a fairly large number of ethnic groups such as the Ijo, Uhrobo, Itsekiri, Ogoni, Ikewere, Kalabari, Egbema and Obolo amongst others (Nigeria Fact Sheet, 2012). It is not an easy task to determine the exact number of ethnic groups inhabiting the Niger Delta, but from the writings of Lauren Ploch (2012) and Judith Asunni (2009) it is certain that there are at least 40 identifiable ethnic groups, of different sizes and proportions, in the region. Each ethnic group is distinct, possessing the so-called essential markers of ethnicity such as **myths** of common origin, languages, customs and practices amongst others. As described above, these myths capture and communicate the respective identities of the constituent ethnic groups of the Niger Delta, and predispose and

inspire them to collective ethnic actions, violent or otherwise. These myths, whether or not historically accurate, are necessary in order to distinguish a particular ethnic group (in-group) from other groups (out-groups) of a similar nature, and in so doing create and reinforce ethnic boundaries. For an in-group, ethnic boundaries foster unity and cooperation, but in relation to ethnic categories, that is, an out-group, ethnic boundaries highlight difference, and are *ipso facto* divisive, creating conditions that potentially favour inter-ethnic tensions or conflict (Horowitz 1985; Smith and Hutchinson 1996: 6; Fearon and Laitin 2000: 20; Kaufman, 2001)

The Ijaw, for instance, is the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta, with a population of about 14 million people. Although they are scattered across many states within the region, they have myths that link them back to a common ancestry. According to Shoup (2011), the Ijaw appears to be one of the oldest ethnic groups in the Niger Delta, and is believed to have lived in the Delta region before the fifth millennium BCE. Some Ijaw people believe they originate from Upper Egypt, while others think their ancestral roots are in South Africa. These suppositions already suggest that the historical accuracy of the Ijaw peoples' narrative or myth of common ancestry is somewhat contested. However, as mentioned earlier, what matters most is not the accuracy of these accounts, but rather the fact that a myth that explains their collective common origin exists. That is all that is required for mobilisation to collective action.

Furthermore, there are other Ijaw ethnic myths or tales that glorify the heroic deeds, resilience and exploits of their ancestors and ethnic group. Ijaw people cherish and take pride in these glorious myths that recapitulate their ethnic group's noble and heroic accomplishments, and which also serve as an inspirational reference point for every generation, motivating them to pursue and accomplish similar noble and heroic deeds (Alagoa 1972; Ngaage 2003; Ogbogbo 2005, 2007). In this, the emotive and mobilising power of ethnic myths is more clearly seen. It is exactly for this reason that Anthony Smith (1984) posits that one of the greatest potencies of ethnic myth (also an ethnic community) lies in its ability to combine interests with affective ties, providing a highly suitable instrument of political action. Ethnic myths and other markers of ethnicity are not only symbols of exclusion, they also represent a large repertoire of attachment and expression. They help define collectivities, dividing the 'us' from the 'them'- a division that better explains mobilisation along ethnic lines in pursuit of 'interests' (Smith, 1984). Attachment and pride in one's ethnic group makes it relatively easy to be mobilised or manipulated along ethnic lines in pursuit of ethnic interest. According to Gurr (1994), it is impossible to mobilise people along ethnic lines if ethnic attachment is lacking. For ethnicity to matter, or at least to become a viable tool for mobilisation, peoples' passionate attachment

to their ethnicity needs to be grown. In the Niger Delta, ethnic identity, attachment and passions are very high.

The Ijaw people of the Niger Delta are passionately proud of their ethnic heritage, identity and affiliation; and this makes it relatively easy to get them mobilised for collective action along ethnic lines. In the course of my fieldwork, I had a chance to witness a meeting of Ijaw youths in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. It was an event organised to discuss the best fund-raising strategy in support of local community sports events. I observed that the expression 'Haa Izon' was often used by speakers, mostly as motivational phrase. I was later made to understand that for an average Ijaw person, that expression: 'Haa Izon' is replete with emotions and meaning. In some way, this expression, as brief as it is , is able to call to mind and make present all the existing positive myths or narratives that define the Ijaw people as unified, industrious and resilient achievers; its use in that context kept the youths motivated and focused on their fundraising exercise to finance their local community sporting event. This is the emotive power of ethnic myths and symbols (words are a form of symbol, amongst others).

Ethnic myths may be constructed positively or hostilely. When they are positively constructed, they are able to mobilise people for peace and rewarding intra/inter-ethnic projects, or for violence (war) when negatively or hostilely constructed. In the Niger Delta, such hostile ethnic myths or narratives exist. There is a popular belief or narrative among the Niger Deltans that the disorder and crisis in their region are caused by the Federal government of Nigeria and the oil multinational companies. They are the external enemies; and are primarily to blame for environmental degradation and other socio-economic and political woes in the region. This explains why a significant number of violent ethnic attacks have been aimed at destroying oil facilities belonging either to the Federal government or the oil companies operating in the region. The goal is to disrupt oil production and transportation which will eventually significantly reduce the oil revenues or funds available to, and controlled, by the federal government. For the regional population of the Niger Delta, the unjust activities of these ethnic enemies must be challenged and opposed if the rights and liberties of the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta are to be restored and respected. These negative or hostile narratives about the federal government and oil companies have not only become popular amongst the Niger Deltans, but have also been received by them as credible. Manipulative elites tap into these carefully and strategically constructed hostile ethnic myths or narratives to heighten peoples' grievance and hatred of both the federal government and the oil companies; making it easier to successfully mobilise the ethnic public to violence in pursuit of their preconceived private

interests. It is for such reasons that Kaufman (2001) views hostile ethnic myth as a necessary and potent instrument, used by chauvinist elites to mobilise ethnic groups to violent conflict, particularly when the hostile myth in question has been popularised and accepted by an ethnic public (in-group) as truism.

Fear and the Niger Delta Conflict

That extreme ethnic violence or war is mainly driven by fear is the bold assertion with which Kaufman opens, in his article 'Ethnic fear and ethnic war in Karabagh' (Kaufman 1998:). This claim is reiterated in *Modern Hatred* (Kaufman 2001), and again in his widely referenced article 'Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice' (Kaufman 2006). Horowitz (1985) and Gurr (1994), amongst others, have expressed similar views; all are unanimous on the basic notion that violent ethnic conflict escalates mainly because one ethnic party in the conflict, and eventually both parties, **fear** that their collective existence as a group is potentially at risk of destruction or extinction in their conflict with the other ethnic group. The prevalence of this sort of fear or phobia (security dilemma) among members of a particular ethnic group eventually motivates and justifies their resorting to violence, either in self-defence or in pre-emptive attacks. So, whenever an ethnic group has violently mobilised as a collectivity, it is usually because they have come to believe, and therefore fear, rightly or wrongly, that their opponent presents a potentially fatal threat to their collective existence as an ethnic group. Kaufman recognises this sort of fear as a pre-condition for extreme violent inter-ethnic confrontation to occur.

These insights are relevant for this project's evaluation of the context of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta, particularly the contribution of fear to the onset and persistence of the regional conflict. This project's careful examination of academic and historical reports on the causes of ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta reveals that fear or phobia, especially of collective extinction, is a major contributor to ethnic violence in the region.

As mentioned earlier, Nigeria is home to more than 250 identifiable ethnic groups (Salawu 2010). But of all these ethnic groups, three (the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa) make up the majority, due to their numerical strength. The rest, including all the constitutive ethnic groups of the Niger Delta region, including the Ijaw, Urhobo, Ikwere, Itsekiri and Ogoni, amongst others, are classed as minorities.

For decades, the minorities of the Niger Delta have complained of marginalisation, exclusion and environmental degradation linked to unethical and careless oil exploitation by both the Nigerian government and oil companies (Faleti, 2013). Although these injustices are at the root of the Niger Delta's ethno-regional grievances, and ultimately of its violent conflict, what needs to be explained concerns the mechanism by which these grievances turn to violence, since there seems to be no necessary connection between grievance one the one hand, and actual violent ethnic confrontations on the other. Some grievances, no matter how extreme, never end in serious violence. So if the Niger Delta grievances metamorphose into violence, as they actually have, it is simply because hostile ethnic myths have been carefully constructed, and purposefully manipulated to make the ethnic population **fear** that their collective existence as a group was under serious threat of possible destruction or extinction if they did not rise up in self-defence against the incessant brutality of both the federal government and the oil companies. When ethnic entrepreneurs are bent on stoking violence, the historical accuracy of such fear-inducing hostile ethnic narratives or myths is irrelevant. What matters is that they exist and are capable, when received by the ethnic public as credible, of passionately stirring them violently against an identifiable and potentially destructive opponent - in this particular instance the federal government of Nigeria and the oil companies. Fear of possible collective destruction is, as noted by Kaufman (1998), a necessary pre-condition for successfully mobilising an ethnic group to violence.

Between 1990 and 2000, a fairly large number of violent ethnic militia organisations such as the IYC (Ijaw youth council), NDPVF (Niger Delta people's volunteer force), and NDV (Niger Delta vigilante) amongst others, were formed in the Niger Delta. These movements had one clear objective – fighting to defend themselves against the numerous injustices and brutality of the federal government and oil companies, which according to them constantly threaten their existence as a people. From the statements of the leaders of these militia organisations, one could discern that the **fear** of a possible collective destruction of both the people and their environment has contributed to impelling various ethnic groups in the Niger Delta to violence.

For instance, Asari Dokubo, one of the most notorious ethnic militia leaders in the Niger Delta revealed that the federal government has been brutally killing indigenes of the Niger Delta just for defending their rights. Challenging this brutality, Asari forewarned the government that his people (the Ijaw ethnic group) would no longer watch as they are progressively decimated, that they would take up arms and fight back, matching force with force (Asairi Dokubo, TV interview, 2013). It is important to observe that Asari Dokubo describes the actions of the

federal government and the oil companies as life-threatening, and in so doing instilled in his people fear the of possible collective ethnic doom if measures, including use of violence, were taken to counter the ethnic enemies – federal government and the oil companies.

For a people confronted with such a life-threatening situation, nothing could be more urgent than fighting for survival, even if violently. As observed by Stern (1995), prevention of mortal danger, more than the pursuit of benefits, impels people to participate in collective action. Threat to life is a more compelling reason for violent mobilisation. A quick glance at some of the foreign policy interventions by some of the global superpowers shows that this is the case. The United States of America for instance often justifies external pre-emptive attacks on territories or peoples perceived as posing some potentially fatal security threats, either to its homeland or to its citizens. So, fear, especially of a potentially fatal threat to a people, as Kaufman observes, is a pre-condition for violent ethnic mobilisation, and experience of the Niger Delta scenario shows that this is a valid hypothesis. This project therefore supports Kaufman's argument that fear, in the hands of manipulative elites, is a powerful and helpful tool for mobilisation to extreme ethnic violence.

In the course of my data collection exercise in the Niger Delta, I had first-hand experience, not only of the brutality of the law enforcement agents in the region, but also of the enormous environmental pollution caused by oil exploitation activities. This situation is without equivocation a very serious and worrisome one. This acknowledged, what is however uncertain is whether the conclusion of impending collective ethnic doom, can necessaily be derived from that state of affairs as Asari Dokubo, an ethnic militia leader, suggests. It seems that a well-meaning and forthright pacifist elite would have been able to address the issues involved without being overly dramatic, that is, excessively stoking ethnic fears. But again, this sort of thinking was reasonably countered by one of the community leaders interviewed during fieldwork. He pointed out that the Niger Deltans began their self-defence with dialogue and negotiation. But since these yielded no meaningful results, the people adopted the path of violence, which actually seems to be working. The federal government now takes the Niger Deltans very seriously, occasionally releasing funds aimed at resolving the regional turmoil (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria; April 2017). But whatever the case, it is important to note that elite manipulators usually exaggerate hostile narratives (myths) as an an effective way of instilling fear in the public, thereby facilitating and strengthening their resolve to undertake any measure, even violence, to ensure their continual subsistence as a people. Minor issues are not sufficient grounds for violent ethnic mobilisation,

but exceptionally serious ones are. This is why manipulative elites present an often-exaggerated account of events, that casts the opponent in a very negative light, as this boost people's willingness to approve of, and support, violent ethnic interventions.

What emerges clearly from the forgoing is that fear, especially of collective ethnic doom, is, as observed by Kaufman (2001; 1998), Gurr (1994), and Stern (1995), an important element in successful mobilisation of an ethnic group to extreme violence. Manipulative elites in the Niger Delta region understand and use this tool to provoke ethnic violence, of which they themselves (elites) are sure beneficiaries.

The next section considers the possible impact of **political space** in fostering violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta. Kaufman argues that political space is a pre-condition for extreme violent conflict in general, and the next section explores how this applies, if at all, to the context of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta.

Political Space and the Niger Delta Conflict

Political space to mobilise, which according to Kaufman (1998; 2001; 2006) is another pre-condition for the occurrence of organised and sustained violent ethnic conflict, refers to the opportunity or freedom of an ethnic group to mobilise for violent action without being repressed by the state. Effective state policing can prevent the spiralling of violent activities, and political repression can also hinder ethnic elites from properly articulating ethnic demands and successfully mobilising their followers to violent conflict. It therefore follows that, where the state maintains an effective apparatus of oppression and repression, extreme and sustained violent mobilisation cannot occur (Kaufman 2001: 32).

The political opportunity referred to here is, according to Kaufman (1998; 2006) composed of two elements. The first element relates to the political space occasioned by state breakdown or by the emboldening support of foreign countries. When the state is weak and no longer disposes of effective intelligence gathering and policing, a vacuum or window of opportunity for groups to violently mobilise is automatically created; quite frequently, especially in countries already rife with inter-ethnic tensions, ethnic groups seize the opportunity to violently mobilise. IN addition, the support of foreign countries, whether in the form of funding or intelligence sharing, could provide an ethnic group with the space or liberty needed to effectively mobilise and resist a state's effort to repress it. The second element is a territorial base. Here, Kaufman's

view is similar to that of Toft (2003) who believes that ethnic rebels or militia cannot successfully mobilise for violence unless they are territorially concentrated in some region, or have got a territorial base in neighbouring countries. A lack of territorial concentration weakens an ethnic organisation's or group's ability to effectively mobilise violently.

The availability of sufficient political space as explained above is very helpful in understanding why ethnic groups of the Niger Delta have, to a very large extent, successfully mobilised for violent actions. The opportunity or space for violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta is provided by the fragility of the Nigerian state, especially in area of intelligence gathering and effective policing. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2005) uses the term 'fragile state' to describe nation-states where conflict is ongoing, or at risk of re-occurring, and in which the central government does not have effective control over its borders or territories, is incapable of providing, or unwilling to provide, vital human necessities and services for a significant portion of its territory, and holds little or no legitimacy amongst its citizens. The United States of America's National Intelligence Council's (NIC) 2005 report: *Mapping the Global Future* uses a similar description of a fragile state. A failed, failing, or fragile state is defined as that having 'expanses of territory and population devoid of effective government control'.

In many respects, the Nigerian state fits the above descriptions of a fragile state; not only is the current Nigerian state incapable of providing vital services for a significant portion of its population, it also does not have effective control of all its political territory. In the North-East part of Nigeria for instance, neither the Nigerian police or the military have been able to contain the insurgency of the Boko-Haram terrorist organisation, and the central government seems to have lost control of the security situation in that region. In the South-South, violent ethnic organisations demanding group-specific rights are still able to mobilise violently without being repressed by the Nigerian state. This is not because the state does not want to repress their violence, but mainly because these ethnic militia organisations in the Niger Delta are very sophisticated in their modes of operation, and are occasionally quite a way ahead of the intelligence-gathering apparatus of the state. All this confirms, as earlier mentioned, that Nigeria is a fragile state, too weak to effectively police its territory. Good policing, as observed by Human Rights Watch (2010), is the bedrock for the rule of law and public safety. In other words, the stability of any country is highly threatened if its police unit is ineffective, incompetent or compromised. Without any prejudice to its occasional good work, studies and experience have shown that the current security crisis in Nigeria, including the ethnic violence

in the Niger Delta, is to a very large extent linked to the incompetence, ineffectiveness and corruption of Nigeria's police force. This negatively impacts on the quality of its operations and ability to keep the country safe (Human Rights Watch 2010; Agbiboa 2015; Nwokolo *et al.* 2018).

During my fieldwork in the Niger Delta, one interview respondent revealed that some militia organisations in the region are able to sustain their violent operations by selling crude oil they have sourced illegally through oil-bunkering on the international market, either for money or in exchange for arms (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria; April 2017). Such a high-profile organised crime would not be possible if the Nigerian state was not fragile, and its security system was not inefficient.

So, experience from Nigeria, particularly as it relates to the issue of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta, corroborate Kaufman's (1998; 2001) view that political space (thanks to which an ethnic group is able to violently mobilise without being repressed), constitutes a pre-condition for an elite's ability to manipulate people. In the Niger Delta, political elites take advantage of the fragility of the Nigerian state to stir an ethnic population to violence. Moreover, the territorial concentration of the ethnic groups of the Niger Delta in the South-Southern part of Nigeria facilitates and strengthens their ability to mobilise. As Toft (2003) argues, an ethnic group is always willing to mobilise in defence of the territory that it identifies as its ancestral homeland.

The next section uses the case of Adaka Boro to exemplify how these pre-conditions are brought together and activated to enable an elite to manipulate an ethnic population into violence.

How Elites Manipulate: The Case of Adaka Boro of the Niger Delta

Earlier in the chapter, it was observed that for the elites to successfully manipulate the public into extreme violent conflict, certain pre-conditions such as ethnic myths, fear, and political opportunity must exist. As important as these conditions are, it is worth noting that they cannot in and of themselves lead to violent mobilisation in the absence of the agency of a manipulative elite or leader. According to Kaufman (2006), it is the strategic manipulation of the aforementioned preconditions by a manipulative leader or elites that eventually leads to violence. Once these pre-conditions are present, the timing for ethnic violence or war is then

explained by an **increase** in ethnic fear, political opportunity and hostile ethnic myth that casts the opponent in a negative light, and the elites' provocative interpretation of symbolic events to generate violent conflict. In such a charged atmosphere, predatory policies and action plans aimed at countering or dominating a rival ethnic group or identified opponent, become popular and are welcomed by the people. An assessment of the dynamics of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta reveals the existence of not just the preconditions for ethnic violence outlined above but also the presence of manipulative elites in the onset and sustenance of some of the major violent mobilisations in the history of Niger Delta agitations. The case of the Boro-led violent mobilisation is a good example.

The earliest, best-organised and most purposeful large-scale ethnic violence in post-independence Niger Delta history was arguably that led by Major Adaka Boro (Faleti, 2013; Ikporukpo 2018). In line with the basic definition of the term 'elite' in Chapter two, as *a person of influence within a larger social category*, Major Jasper Adaka Boro is arguably a member of an elite. Born in Oloibri, in present day Bayelsa state of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, in 1938, Adaka Boro was among just a few individuals of his time to receive a formal British education and training in post-colonial Nigeria. Following his graduation from high school, Boro was employed as a teacher, a job he did diligently, albeit briefly, before joining the police force, and later the army - rising to the rank of Major. Within the Nigeria of this historical epoch, these were rare, noble and enviable achievements, especially for someone his age. By virtue of his qualifications, positions, and exposure, Adaka Boro was in many respects an influential member of his ethnic group. In other words, he was elite, and in this capacity, as an influential figure, he mobilised his people (the Ijaw) to rebel against the Federal republic of Nigeria against what may be described as crippling injustices against the Ijaw people, and the Niger Delta region in general. Although this rebellion was short lived and ill-fated, none could reasonably doubt Adaka Boro's success in persuading his people to violent ethnic mobilisation against the federal government of Nigeria. But a question that remains to be answered is this: How was he able to get rational adults to support or actively participate in such a violent ethnic action, even at risk to their own lives? This is perhaps where the details provided by Kaufman's theory of ethnic conflict prove to be very relevant and helpful. According to Kaufman (2001; 2006), elites cannot successfully manipulate rational adults unless the following preconditions already exist: hostile ethnic myths, political opportunity, and fear; and there are of course some sort of interests or benefits to be attained. In the light of these conditions, we are now able to understand that Adaka Boro was able to mobilise his people by carefully tapping into some

popular hostile ethnic myths that cast the Nigerian government in a negative light to stoke ethnic grievance and fear, and arouse the ethnic public against the federal government. To better appreciate this point, it may be helpful to briefly analyse a portion of Adaka Boro's motivational speech to his people. It goes thus:

> *"Today is a great day, not only in your lives" (as Ijaw people), "but also in the history of the Niger Delta. Perhaps, it will be the greatest day for a very long time. This is not because we are going to bring the heavens down, but because we are going to demonstrate to the world what and how we feel about oppression….Remember your 70 year old grandmother who still farms to eat, remember also your poverty stricken people and then, remember too, your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom" (Adaka Boro, February 23rd 1966; quoted in Oriola 2016)*

A close examination of this excerpt shows that Adaka Boro's speech contains all the pre-conditions for ethnic violence outlined by Kaufman (1998; 2001). I have highlighted some of the most useful phrases. First: ***"Today is a great day, not only in your lives" (as Ijaw people), "but also in the history of the Niger Delta."*** This statement reminds Adaka's audience, the Ijaw people, of their shared history; that is, their ancestral descent and their collective experience as a people. As Smith (1984), Anderson (2006) and Kaufman (2001) (as well as other scholars of ethnicity and nationalism) have argued, the histories of ethnic groups or nations are usually captured and communicated through ethnic myths and symbols, which play a vital role in articulating their identities and giving them a sense of purpose. The Ijaw ethnic group, who were the principal audience of Adaka Boro's speech, have a number of ethnic myths that articulate and communicate the group's origin and collective experiences of ethnic success, failure, or suffering. Some of these myths or narratives may be found in the writings of Alagoa (1966) and Obi *et al.* (2011). So, in this first statement, the Ijaws are reminded of their common history and bond as a people, that is, as a distinct ethnic group with a purpose, and of their collective experience of marginalisation, injustice and oppression at the hands of the federal government of Nigeria. In making reference to the peoplehood of the Ijaw, Adaka Boro was able to unite them. In provocatively referring to the collective suffering that they have endured at the hands of the federal government of Nigeria, Boro was able to subtly activate his people's (ethnic) hatred and grievance against the federal government and dispose

them to violently mobilise against their identified ethnic foe - the federal government. When Adaka Boro finally asked his people to fight for their rights and freedom, the people were already well disposed and finally joined in the Boro-led rebellion against the federal government, which took place on the 5th day of November 1966. The inability of the Nigerian state to effectively police its territory provided a window of opportunity (a political space) ceased by Boro and his cohort to violently mobilise against the federal government. This bloody violent confrontation lasted for twelve days before the superior federal forces were eventually able to pacify the region, bringing it under the control of the federal government. Freedom from severe oppression, which was expected to restore the ethno-regional ability to control their own economic resources, amongst other benefits, was the collective interest or objective that the Ijaw people were being invited to fight for. So as noted in the Chapter four above, there was clearly an interest to pursue.

The overarching claim of elite manipulation theory, according to Synder (2000), Fearon and Laitin (2000), Gurr (1994), and Kaufmann (2001) amongst others, is that elites mobilise an ethnic public to violence because of the socio-economic or political benefits they stand to attain. If this theoretical claim is anything to go by, it follows that Adaka Boro incited his people to rebellion because of potential political and economic gains he stood to gain. A quick pry into Adaka Boro's personal life reveals that he was a very ambitious young man. Before the 1960s, an era when access to formal British education was still very uncommon in Nigeria, Adaka Boro was already a fairly well-educated man. He served as the first students' union president of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, worked as a school teacher, police officer, and later as a military officer in the Nigerian Army - rising to the rank of Major (Ikporukpo, 2018). All these are pointers to his ambitiousness and penchant for power and elitism. Going by all these, there may be good grounds for believing that Adaka Boro's decision to mobilise his people to violent conflict against the federal government may have been inspired by a clear understanding that the successful overthrow of the Nigerian government, or a successful secession of his region from Nigeria, would be politically and socio-economically rewarding for him, especially as he would stand a good chance of becoming the head of state, either of Nigeria, or of the would-have-been-independent Niger Delta Republic. The hidden private interests elites pursue are frequently constructed and presented as ethnic interests, making it easy for them to ride smoothly and successfully on the back of an ethnic group's support to attain these pre-conceived private ends. In leading his people to revolution against the federal government, Adaka Boro did not expressly indicate that he pursued any private interest. The

cause he fought for was presented and pursed as an ethnic one. However, from what is historically known about Boro as an ambitious and hard-working young man with penchant for power and leadership, one cannot entirely rule out the possibility that his private interests may have been the underlying reason for him to incite a historic rebellion against the federal government of Nigeria. Whatever the case, this cannot be proved conclusively, especially because Boro's rebellion was not successful, which closes off the possibility of establishing that he led an ethnic rebellion for his own egoistic ends. However, the reverse would have been the case had he been successful, for analysts would have been able to examine his activities and moves after the rebellion, and based on that, credibly establish whether or not the Boro-led rebellion was a case of 'elite manipulation'; that is, a situation in which elites instigate violence just for their own selfish interests. It is important to note here an obvious weakness of elite manipulation theory. It does not provide for the possibility that elites may sometimes violently mobilise an ethnic group altruistically, that is, without necessarily having any ulterior motive or private end in view. It is reasonable to say that as an elite, Boro was instrumental in leading the Niger-Delta to conflict. His ability to tap into ethnic grievances and successfully persuade his people to engage violent conflict, was a game changer. He was central to, and indispensable in, bringing about this violent conflict. The situation would have been different had he chosen not to go down the path of violence. Without his involvement, violent mobilisation would not have occurred. From the foregoing, there is no doubt that elites, as Kaufman (2001) argues play important roles in the spiralling of ethnic violence. The case of the Boro-led insurrection in the Niger Delta is a good instance of this; even if it remains difficult in that particular scenario to determine what his true motives were. The motive might have been egoism, just as it may also have been altruism. Whatever be the case, the pre-conditions of fear, ethnic myth, and political space helped him effectively mobilise an ethnic population to violence, and Kaufman is right about the mechanism of elite manipulation.

Another example that may be useful in demonstrating the indispensability of elites in mobilising for ethnic violence, or for peace, is the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa. This is examined in the next section.

Saro-Wiwa, a 'Manipulative Elite'?

After the defeat of the Adaka Boro led Niger Delta revolution, no other remarkable large scale violent ethnic mobilisation occurred in the region until the 1990s when Ken Saro Wiwa, an

indigene of Ogoniland of the Niger-Delta area, mobilised his ethnic group to one of the most powerful, organised and most purposeful protests against both the oil companies operation in his homeland and the federal government of Nigeria. Saro Wiwa, an environmental activist, a scholar, an author, a television producer, a 1995 winner of the prestigious 'Goldman Environmental Prize', and a recipient of the highly reputable 'Right to Livelihood Award', was without doubt one of the most influential elites, not only in Ogoni, but also in the entire Niger Delta region. In 1990, he founded the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) which articulated the ethnic grievances and demands of the Ogoni people, and through a series of non-violent protests, challenged both the oil industry and the federal government of Nigeria over oil spillages and the associated environmental degradation which put their lives at great risk. Ogoniland, an area which prior to the discovery of oil was one of the cleanest and most serene ecosystems in Nigeria, has arguably become the most life-threatening habitat in the country thanks to oil-related environmental pollution. The Saro Wiwa led an initiative (protest) that gained traction as members of his ethnic group identified with his cause, and actively participated in it.

To better understand how Saro wiwa was able to successfully get the ethnic crowd to back his initiative, it is again helpful to use Kaufman's (1998; 2001) pre-conditions for violent ethnic mobilisation (outlined above). The first is the hostile ethnic myth. There was already, among the Ogoni people a long-standing, pervasive and popular hostile ethnic myth that identifies the federal government as an enemy that had continuously stolen the natural resources of the Ogoni people, but not used them in any way to benefit them. Nearly all the Ogoni people believed that this negligence and injustice was largely due to their (Ogoni) minority status, otherwise the reverse would have been the case. In democratic voting and decision-making processes in Nigeria, the numerical strength of an ethnic group is important. But the Ogoni people, as a minority, lacks such strength; and by that very fact, they are often disadvantaged on a number of fronts. In the course of my interviews, one respondent complained about how the ethnic categories of the Niger Delta regions have been heavily disadvantaged because of their minority status (Interview response by a Member of Bayelsa state House of Assembly in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State Nigeria; June 2017). In pursuit of his cause, Saro Wiwa carefully tapped into this popular and hostile myth to instil fear in his people, persuading them of the need to urgently and vigorously challenge the injustices of the federal government and the oil companies, otherwise their collective existence as a people was at risk of extinction. They

therefore needed to fight for their collective survival. This is a large part of the reason that the term *survival* appears in the name of the movement formed to pursue this ethnic cause: Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). With this persuasion, the Ogoni people were disposed and made even readier to act. Again, the territorial concentration of the Ogoni people, coupled with the government's fragility and its ineffective policing of the region provided the opportunity for the people to mobilise for action successfully. All these conditions enabled Saro-Wiwa to effectively mobilise his people for collective ethnic action.

In many respects, Adaka Boro and Saro Wiwa's mobilisation strategies are similar and reflect the views of Rothchild (1997) and Kaufman (2001) on the indispensable role of an influential figure in provoking collective ethnic action. The only difference between Adaka Boro and Saro Wiwa is that the latter led the people to peaceful, rather than to violent ethnic protests, even if in principle he (Wiwa) could have as effectively taken the path of violent mobilisation as Adaka Boro.

Because the objective of this chapter, as mentioned earlier, is to examine the ways in which elites have contributed to the orchestration and spiralling of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta, one might wonder why Saro Wiwa, a man who never chose the path of violence to pursue ethnic demands, has been brought into the current analyses. I have chosen to discuss Saro Wiwa here for a number of reasons. The first is to demonstrate by means of this example that elites have enormous capacity, not just for violent ethnic mobilisation but also for peace; the mechanism of elite mobilisation was exactly the same in each case, except that the outcome of one was violence and of the other a powerful peaceful protest. The second reason is that discussing Saro Wiwa's case, especially his eventual murder by the military, is a useful way to understand the rise, in the 1990s and beyond, of violent ethnic mobilisations, militias and popular resistance in the Niger Delta. The post 1990 ethnic violence cannot be properly understood without mentioning Saro Wiwa – for it was grievances over his death that led to the proliferation of ethnic militias in the Niger Delta region.

Saro Wiwa's Execution and the Rise of Violent Ethnic Militias in the Niger Delta

In 1995, General Sani Abacha, the then Nigerian military Head of State and dictator ordered the execution of Saro Wiwa by hanging. A number of false accusations were levelled against

him. But before he had any chance to defend himself properly, he was hastily tried in a heavily biased military tribunal and sentenced to death by hanging. His killing was ordered as a means of stifling demands for social justice made by him and his cohort on behalf of their ethnic group - the Ogoni. Both local and international figures and organisations tried in vain to reverse the military tribunal's verdict.

Saro Wiwa's death not only shocked the world and the Niger Delta region, but also led to a rise in armed resistance in the Niger Delta. His murder was a strong signal for both the Ogoni people and the entire Niger Delta region that the federal government had become closed to peaceful resolution of conflict. In view of this violence became a very handy option. This was how ethnic militias formed and commenced attacks on oil facilities and installations in the region. These violent activities were supported by the Niger Delta elites who funded, and to a large extent also controlled, these violent activities for some private political and, or, economic ends.

Just as the Niger Deltans anticipated, the use of violence seemed to have had more success in pressurising the federal government than the peaceful means previously employed, especially by Saro Wiwa, for the federal government saw the revenue generated by oil drop significantly. For instance, oil bunkering and assaults on oil installations by the militants caused the federal government to lose the sum of 6.8 billion dollars between 1999 and 2004, a loss that dramatically plummeted to about 6 million dollars daily, which translated to approximately 4.4 billion annually by 2007 (Watts 2007). For a country like Nigeria where 95 percent of foreign exchange revenue comes from oil, the violent and destabilising activities of the ethnic militias and organisations in the region is issue to worry about.

Since violent armed resistance started in the Niger Delta, there has been a number of attempts by the federal government to negotiate with the region on how to contain it, and in so doing remove obstacles to oil production and distribution. It is for such reasons that Duruji (2015) argues that violent ethnic mobilisation and militias seem to have become a new form of pressure group used by ethnic groups and their elites to attain political or economic benefit. He suggests that a clear pattern has now emerged in Nigeria's Fourth Republic in which violence is used as a means of attention-seeking; that is, to draw the government's attention to ethnic demands and force it to the negotiation table (Duruji 2008). In the case of the Niger Delta, such negotiations and bargains have been made through the Niger Delta's elites and official representatives of the people, such as community chiefs and leaders (Nwokolo, 2018).

It is in this elite bargain, often non-transparent and laden with corruption, between the Niger Delta and the federal government that another dimension of elites' contributions or roles in either stoking or calming violence is more glaringly witnessed. Over the years, the federal government has made a number of attempts to negotiate a resolution to the phenomenon of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta. Among these, one of the most widely known has been the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP). More will be said about this in the next section.

Elites, Corruption, Patron-Client Network, Youth Resistance and Ethnic Violence in the Niger Delta

One of the most significant efforts by the federal government to address and eradicate violent conflict in the Niger Delta has been the introduction of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP). PAP, as was mentioned above, is the Nigerian version of the United Nations' DDR strategy (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration). DDR is a United Nations' Peace keeping programme that has been meaningfully used in the reduction of armed conflict in some countries of the world including Dafur, Congo, Mali, South Sudan, and Central African Republic (Cockayne et al., 2015). As the name implies, this programme aimed to disarm the militants and disband militia groups, to create attractive opportunities and offers that discourage ex-combatants from participating further in armed conflict, and finally to create a way for them (ex-combatants) to be eventually re-integrated into normal society.

On the 25th June 2009, and in what appeared to be a genuine commitment to the eradication of the Niger Delta violent conflict, President Musa Yaradua announced his proposed amnesty package for the militants, and subsequently released the enormous sum of 50 billion naira (approximately one billion US dollars) to get this initiative under way. To properly execute this programme, the government set up a Presidential Amnesty Implementation Committee led by Major General Godwin Abe. According to Nwokolo *et al* (2018), this presidential amnesty programme was not entirely successful, due mainly to mismanagement and corruption of elites - the public officials charged with its implementation. For instance, Akinkuotu (2017) notes that the former PAP coordinator Kingsley Kuku, a Niger Delta indigene, was arrested and questioned, alongside some Nigerian bank officials, for allegedly diverting a sum of 3 billion Naira (6 million US dollars) that was earmarked for the payment of 1,500 Niger Delta ex-militants who had embraced the presidential amnesty programme. To date, no verdict has been given on this case; and the matter is currently no longer being seriously investigated. Violent

mobilisation in the Niger Delta has therefore not been eradicated, partly because the promise made to the ex-militants within the framework of the PAP deal has not been fulfilled; some of the elites charged with the implementation of the programme took advantage of their position to illegally and fraudulently divert a huge portion of the funds meant for this programme for personal use, rather than utilising it for the project as intended. Diversion of funds intended for solutions to the problem of violent ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta is obviously a way in which the elites intentionally perpetuate the cycle of violence in the region, in order to constantly benefit from that situation. This example corroborates the elite manipulation theory which claims that elites cause violence to occur and persist because of the gains they derive from it (Gurr 1994; Brass 1997; Fearon and Laitin 2000; Synder 2000; Kaufman 2001).

For anyone unfamiliar with the subject of prebendalism and the patron-client network in Nigeria, a question that immediately comes to mind is: why not arrest and prosecute those that have been accused of fraudulently carting away public funds, especially those meant for resolving the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region? This question is legitimate. In countries where the rule of law is respected, it should be to expect severe consequences for the embezzlement of public funds. But in Nigeria, unfortunately, things sometimes work a bit differently. There is a 'special logic' that quite frequently guides the state's bureaucracy, and it is important to understand this. Chabal and Daloz's (1999) refer to it as prebendalism. Briefly defined, prebendalism denotes a political system in which elected government officials arrogate to themselves the right to deploy the state's revenues, even if it is unlawful, to the benefit of their own supporters, who, in return for favours received continue to provide their loyalty and support to these leaders (their patrons), even when this may require employing violent means (Bayart 1994; Chabal and Daloz 1999). The relationship between the leaders (elites) and their supporters in the context of prebendalism is not arbitrary. It has rather been carefully constructed to provide a network of mutual protection in times of crisis. It is the solid support and protection provided by this informal and often nefarious network that usually frustrates, obstructs and eventually eliminates every attempt at investigating corrupt officials in Nigeria. The stronger a leader's network, the more easily he could get away with crime such as murder, corruption and embezzlement of public funds amongst other crimes. However, he (the leader) must ensure that his network of supporters and allies benefits from the spoil, either directly, or indirectly through the award of bogus contracts or political appointments that offer them a fresh opportunity to steal from the public treasury without fear of being prosecuted. Consequently, there is a network that is always ready to provide the needed shield and support.

Often, efforts are made to co-opt small social groups, religious, professional, and militia groups into this network (Chabal and Daloz, 1999).

Thus, if efforts to prosecute and incarcerate corrupt elites such as Kingsley Kuku and other elites who have been accused of fraudulently diverting or looting the funds meant for solving the problem of armed militancy and underdevelopment in the Niger Delta have been unsuccessful, this is basically due to the pervasiveness of prebendalism and patron-client networks, which offer formidable protection to corrupt elites in Nigeria. Rather than spending money demobilising ethnic militants, in line with the objectives and prescription of the PAP, and on narrowing economic inequalities and other social justice issues for which the Niger Delta region violently agitates, these elites have chosen to fraudulently divert these funds for personal use, and to bribe the leaders of the violent militia organisations operating in the Niger Delta, to momentarily prevent them from attacking oil installations and causing further violence.

Ekeh (2014) and Oriola *et al* (2013) recount a shady deal in which political elites payed huge sums of money to leaders of some violent ethnic militias in the Niger Delta in order to prevent attacks on oil facilities. Leaders of violent ethnic militia organisations such as Asari Dokubo, Ateke Tom, Victor Ben Ebikabowei, and Ekpemupolo (ethnic militia leaders) were reported to have received 9 million USD, 3.8 million USD, 2.8 million USD, and 22.9 million USD respectively during President Jonathan's administration in order to calm their violent attacks and activities in the region. It is important to remember that the money spent on bribing these militants is part of a larger fund earmarked for infrastructural developments, job creation and provision of other amenities useful for demobilising militants and re-integrating them into normal society. But then, spending money on these projects would not leave enough loopholes for elites' to divert and embezzle some for their own private use. For this reason, elites have preferred to bribe, thus keeping the cycle of violent agitations in the Niger Delta ever alive. The revocation of this shady agreement in 2015, that is, post President Jonathan's administration, has continued to provoke serious threats and attacks on oil facilities in the Niger Delta (Nwokolo, 2018). This shady and informal means of addressing the Niger Delta crisis does nothing positive, but perpetuates the cycle of violence, bribery and corruption in the region.

Chapter four discussed how the rise of ethnic violence and militia in the Niger Delta is linked to the region's grievances over its economic and political marginalisation, lack of

infrastructural development and environmental degradation. Both the elites and the ethnic militia groups that have sprung up in the region claim to be fighting on behalf of their ethnic populations for the reversal and correction of these ethno-regional social injustices. However, what has been witnessed in the Niger Delta, as explained above, is the **collusion** of elites (and the so-called official representatives of the people) to loot funds designated for resolving the regional turmoil. It was in reference to this that one of my respondents (a community ruler) speaking of government officials and the oil companies, said:

> *Rather than address the critical issues that the militants are raising, there is an attempt to compromise the key figures in the struggle. And so, they award them bogus contracts, make large sums of money available to them. These militants become very comfortable and a good number of them abandon the struggle. However, there is a pool of other militants waiting to take over, because the original issues had not been addressed. And so, there is a sense in which you can talk about the militant economy, in which it pays to harass the state or the oil company and force them to settle (make money available to them). The amount of money in question is so substantial that militancy becomes more beneficial than going to find a genuine type of employment. They have been wrongly socialised, and a good number have gotten used to it. (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria; April 2017)*

This quote offers a sense of how the elites tap into hostile ethnic myths, and fear to create violent conflict in the Niger Delta as a way of forcing the federal government to release funds for resolving the root causes of violent agitations in the region. But the lack of will and commitment on the part of the elites to use these funds for their designated purpose not only benefits them (the elites), but also perpetuates the regional violence. All this highlights the existence, within the context of the Niger Delta violent crisis, of the necessary pre-conditions for violent ethnic mobilisation outlined by Kaufman (1998; 2001; 2006), especially the fact that elites play an incredibly important role in provoking and sustaining violent ethnic conflict for their personal economic, and, or, political gains. Therefore, any meaningful effort to address the problem of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta must take into consideration the factors that favour its occurrence and persistence such as hostile ethnic myths, interests, and certainly the role of manipulative elites.

The Place of Youth Resistance in The Niger Delta Conflict

There is now a substantial amount of work on youth resistance and participation in the violence in the Niger Delta. The major focus of this literature is usually to show that youths, not just the elites, are equally relevant in accounting for why ethnic violence occurs in the Niger Delta. Iwilade (2017) makes a concerted effort to explain and shed more light on this phenomenon, thanks to some concrete instances of youth-led insurgencies in the Niger Delta region, particularly in one of its prominent states: Rivers State.

This thesis does not deny youth involvement and participation in the Niger Delta conflict and acknowledges its occurrence in several chapters, particularly in discussions of violent ethnic militia groups – a predominantly youth organisation, and sphere of activity. The same could be said of Kaufman – the scholar whose ethnosymbolic theory has been creatively deployed as a guide for this thesis. A significant portion of *Modern Hatreds* (2000), for instance, was dedicated to the examination and analyses of the nature and character of youth-led violent insurrections. But even then, he did not consider this to be a "necessary" factor for the spiralling and persistence of extreme violent ethnic mobilisation. However, Kaufman's failure to consider irate youths (unlike elites) to be necessary for the provocation and ***maintenance*** of violent ethnic mobilisation is mainly because he perceives them as subservient to, and largely dependent on, the actions and inactions of corrupt and manipulative elites. When closely examined, it would quickly become evident how so-called violent youth mobilisation or resistance is often a reaction to the unjust attitudes, actions, or inactions of corrupt or manipulative elites. Considering the other side of the coin and imagining for a moment that the Nigerian and the Niger Delta elites (rulers, leader, and influential others) were neither corrupt nor manipulative; that is, that they properly exercised their functions as 'just' leaders and men of honour, the Niger Delta youths would not have any cause to agitate or engage in any well-structured, organised and sustained violent mobilisation. If they tried, they would not only have no moral justification for their violent activities, but elites also have the necessary state *apparatus* at their disposal to contain, quell and disperse them. Unfortunately, however, this is not the state of affairs in the Niger Delta. On the contrary, the true scenario is one in which manipulative and corrupt elites fuel the regional crisis through unjust and illegitimate actions and inactions, and these provide the youths with the moral grounds and impetus for violent resistance and agitation. Thus, if Kaufman did not consider it necessary to include the mass-led mobilisation as part of the necessary conditions for extreme violent ethnic conflict, it is mainly because its viability is dependent on the attitudes, actions, and inactions of the elites.

Injustice breeds rebellion. The youth resistance or rebellion in the Niger Delta is a natural consequence of the 'unjustness' of corrupt and manipulative elites both in Nigeria and in the region, rather than, strictly speaking, one of the necessary causes of the regional crisis. It is also for this reason that this thesis concentrates more on the examination of the roles of the elites than on the violent activities of youths. It is through discussion of the negative and provocative actions/inactions of the elites in the region that the place of youth resistance in the Niger Delta crisis can be better understood.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to examine whether or not elites have contributed to the spiralling and persistence of the Niger Delta conflict. Analysis of the fieldwork interviews as well as of the supplementary sources of primary data all point in the same direction – they show that these individuals have played significant enabling roles in the regional crisis. The contributory role of irate youths in inflaming violent conflict has also been acknowledged. However, of all the sources of data examined, none has explained the mechanism of the crisis; that is, how it has occurred, or the means by which it was brought about. Yet understanding the mechanism by which ethnic tensions metamorphose into large-scale violence is important, as this would enable bespoke conflict resolution strategies to be designed. Kaufman's theory has been used extensively throughout this thesis to fill this gap in knowledge, and to offer an explanation of the mechanism of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta region.

In this chapter, following Kauman, Gurr, Horowitz, and other ethnosymbolists, I have briefly explained the role of ethnic myths in the provocation of ethnic violence. Ordinarily, one would have expected the causal role of ethnicity in the rise and persistence of the regional crisis to be pretty clear. This however is not the case. In the course of my interviews, I encountered individuals who believed that ethnicity is not relevant in understanding and explaining the regional conflict. Economy or resource, they say, is. In the next chapter, therefore, I consider the possible roles of ethnicity in the spiralling and persistence of violent ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta. It appears that there is some sort of bifurcation on the causal impact of ethnicity on violent conflict involving ethnic group(s), not just among my interviewees, but also amongst established scholars in the field of ethnic violence. These debates are explored in greater detail below, particularly in relation to the subject of violent ethnic mobilisations in the Niger Delta region.

CHAPTER 6

ETHNICITY: A CAUSAL FACTOR IN THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT?

The role of ethnicity in the generation and persistence of violent conflict between ethnic groups is still a highly contested issue. While some of the economy or resource-based theorists of ethnic violence such as Fearon and Laitin (2003); Collier and Hoeffler (2000) and Muller and Seligson (1987), amongst others, tend to downplay, or entirely negate, the contribution of ethnicity in the onset of politically salient violent conflict between ethnic groups, there are others including Smith (1984); Gurr (1994), Kaufman (2001), and Estaben *et al*.(2012) who, in spite of recognising the economic dimension of ethnic violence, still persuasively uphold the relevance of ethnicity in the orchestration, occurrence and persistence of violent conflict among ethnic groups. This chapter critically examines these debates, particularly as they relate to the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region. The chapter's overall aim is to establish whether or not ethnicity has played any role in the spiralling of the Niger Delta's regional turmoil.

Ethnicity is one of the key concepts employed in this research project. The term, and its cognates such as *ethno* and *ethnic*, have been mentioned more than 315 times in the entire thesis, and discussed to some extent in nearly all its major sections. This notwithstanding, when it comes to the term's causal correlation with violence in the Niger Delta region, only chapter five has addressed the issue, and even then only partially, as part of the attempt to explain how manipulative elites exploit ethnic myths and sentiments to provoke violence. However, because the ethnosymbolic theoretical framework of the project demands, amongst other things, a critical and robust examination of the role of ethnicity in the spiralling and persistence of ethnic violence, particularly in the Niger Delta region, it is worthwhile engage in a more detailed discussion. This is the *raison d'etre* of this chapter.

Over the years, economy and resource-based theorists of ethnic violence have vitiated or completely negated the impact and relevance of ethnicity in conflict generation and persistence. The epistemological viewpoint championed by these theorists, has gradually, and for a long time, informed conflict resolution policies and action plans employed in the resolution of ethnic conflict, in some well-known ethnically divided societies such as Nigeria. Some of the elites interviewed in the course of my fieldwork have also neglected, denied, or ignored the role of ethnicity. For this category of respondents, ethnicity is not a relevant contributory factor in

spiralling and persistence of the regional conflict. This chapter, and indeed the entire thesis, is not satisfied with that view, for there is something theoretically unsettling about it.

Having therefore critically examined the phenomenon and dynamics of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta, as well as the possible roles of ethnicity in the entire conflict scenario, the results clearly suggest that ethnicity is a relevant causal factor in the Niger Delta's regional conflict. This concurs with the view of Kaufman (2001) who upholds the indispensability of ethnicity (hostile ethnic myths) in provoking and sustaining ethnic conflict; it is also in line with Gurr and Harff (1994) who recognise the important role of ethnic solidarity and cohesion in the spiralling and maintenance of ethnic violence; and it is also in agreement with Estaben (2012) and others, whose empirically-based research findings reveal that *ethnic polarisation* has a substantial impact on conflict across a number of different specifications within ethnically deeply divided societies when ethnic cohesion is high. Overall, the core stance defended here is that ethnicity is a causal factor in the Niger Delta's violent turmoil, and that the regional crisis could not be fully and robustly explained without affirming its contribution to the dynamic of the entire conflict.

The chapter commences with a critical examination of the data obtained from the field on peoples' opinion regarding the possible role of ethnicity in the Niger Delta violent conflict. This is very important, because peoples' understanding of the nature and dynamics of conflict shapes, in no small measure, their conflict resolution strategies and choices. There is a very high probability that policy makers for whom ethnicity is not a factor in conflict generation would not take it into consideration in their conflict resolution plans and implementation and vice versa. This section is followed by some historically based evidence that highlights the origin and motive for the construction of modern Nigerian ethnicity, as well as its implication for wealth distribution and conflict, especially in the Niger Delta region.

Any Possible Correlation Between Ethnicity and The Niger Delta Violence? - Opinions from the Field

In order to establish, especially from the perspective of the Niger Delta's elites whether or not ethnicity has been an influential factor in the onset and persistence of its regional conflict, interviewees were asked a set of deliberately formulated interview questions. Feedback obtained from the respondents reveals a significant divergence of opinions on the causal impact

of ethnicity in the Niger Delta violence; for while some (9 out of 16 persons interviewed) were convinced of the indispensable role of ethnicity in the spiralling and persistence of the regional crisis, the rest dismissed it as unimportant. For instance, when asked to comment on whether or not ethnicity had played any role in the spiralling and sustenance of the Niger Delta's violent crisis, one traditional leader responded:

> *No, I do not think that ethnic identity was an important element in the conflict when you talk about the region as a whole.*

A little bit later, he added:

> *What urged people to participate was a common experience of injustice, environmental degradation and marginalisation. (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria; May 2017, int. num. B,2)*

Responding to the same question, a member of the Bayelsa State's House of Assembly answered:

> *Yes, ethnicity has a very great influence here. (Interview response by a Member of Bayelsa state House of Assembly in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State Nigeria; June 2017, int. num. C,2)*

For him there was no doubt that ethnicity is a factor in the regional conflict. Yet another respondent (a traditional ruler), in speaking about the criteria for membership to the numerous violent militia organisations in the Niger Delta, brings out some ethnic dimension of the regional crisis. The question was: What is the criteria for membership into these militant organisations? Is it ethnic based or are the organisations open to those of other ethnic categories? His response was:

> *Ehmm. They are largely ethnic based. I chose my words carefully because the resistance struggles became organised first along community lines, and then, the Ogoni insurrection took it to an ethnic level, such that after MOSOP came on board, we started having other groups such as Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) and so on; all having the flavour of an ethnic group. The Ijaws, the Ikwere, the Urhobo, the Itshekiri have all organised themselves along those lines. For instance, the MEND was largely an Ijaw thing, with the Egbesu playing a major role in their affairs. I used the word 'largely' advisedly because, occasionally, you find those who tag themselves activists who have lived amongst these peoples, who although not of that ethnic origin realise that the lives cannot be separated from that ethnic environment, and so have come to associate and identify with the struggle … which was an ethnic struggle originally. (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria; April 2017; int. num. A)*

For this last respondent, the criteria for membership of these violent militia organisations is primarily and basically ethnicity, even if sympathisers do occasionally identify with this ethnic cause.

These responses, although they vary, are representative of all the answers on the subject of ethnicity by the other interviewees; they synthetically capture the basic stances of both those who recognise the causal relevance of ethnicity in the Niger Delta conflict, and those who do not. This invariably leads to a twofold conclusion: (a) that ethnicity *is* of causal importance in the Niger Delta violent conflict; (b) that ethnicity *is not* of causal importance in the Niger Delta violent conflict. These diametrically opposed stances show that the question of the causal role of ethnicity in the Niger Delta conflict remains a contested issue. It is in regard to this conundrum that this chapter is helpful because it aims to clarify the contribution of ethnicity to the Niger Delta conflict.

It is necessary to examine the responses above more critically. In the first (**int. num. B2**) there is an attempt to deny, or rather an outright denial, of the role of ethnicity in the Niger Delta violent conflict. The respondent suggested that injustice and marginalisation of the region, rather than ethnicity, constitute the motive for conflict. This position fundamentally reflects the view of the economy or resource-based theorists of ethnic violence who often contend that unequal distribution, or access, to the socio-economic values of an ethnically plural state is the reason for conflict, violent or otherwise. The Marxist paradigm that income or wealth inequality is a major cause of conflict has had an enormous influence on early empirical researchers of ethnic conflict, making them focus on indicators of wealth distribution or economic inequalities within an ethnically plural society, as passible correlates of conflict. This view is reflected in the work of Brockett (1992), Muller and Seligson (1987); and Muller (2000), amongst others. However, as Lichbach's survey article of 1989 suggests, the results obtained from these were generally ambiguous (Cited in Estaben *et al* 2012) . The effort at this point is not to deny that income or wealth inequality influences conflict. Definitely, unjust disparity in wealth or income distribution, as became evident in Chapter 4 above, constitutes a major driver of conflict particularly in the Niger Delta region, but this does not by any means preclude a contributory role for ethnicity in the entire conundrum. Quite naturally, it is reasonable to expect that poor and marginalised people would hold some grievances and antagonisms against the rich, especially when the latter is perceived as being the reason for

their poverty. But for sustained violence to ensue, these grievances and antagonisms need to be properly channelled into organised action - an activity that often requires a large quantity of of finance and expertise. That the poor cannot usually afford these often militates against their capacity to successfully mobilise for sustained violent insurrection against an affluent opponent. Most Niger Delta militants, as reported by Asuni (2009), are also poor – making it hard or impossible for them to finance and sustain the conflict. So, they simply turn to other markers such as religion, nationalism or ethnicity as the basis for mobilisation and ordering of actions. Considered from this angle, a different understanding of social conflict emerges. As Estaben *et al* (2012:131) note: social conflict 'could emanate from economic motivations, but find its expression through the cleavages generated by religion, ethnicity or national origins'. The poor and economically marginalised communities of the Niger Delta, just as Estaben *et al*. (2012) argue, have found a strong base for violent mobilisation in the cleavage provided by ethnicity. This manner of conceiving of ethnic violence is also affirmed in Kaufman (2001; 2013), Gurr and Harff (1994) and Estaben *et al* (2012), among others, who go beyond the economic roots of ethnic violence to recognise the causal contribution of ethnicity in the spiralling and persistence of violence conflicts that are classed as ethnic. This perspective is however not very popular with some economy and resource-based scholars of ethnic violence, including Fearon and Laitin (2003), Muller (2000), Collier and Hoeffler (2001). It is certainly not popular with the interview respondent cited above **(Int. num. B2)**. These either downplay the causal role of ethnicity in conflict generation, or deny it altogether.

On the other hand, it is important to emphasise that interviewees who acknowledged the causal impact of ethnicity in the Niger Delta violent conflict **(int. nums. A and C)**, are not simply naive – since beyond acknowledging the impact of ethnicity in the Niger Delta conflict, they also, in a separate interview question, affirmed the indispensable contributions of competing economic or resource interests in the rise of this regional imbroglio. In other words, they accept that resource or economic inequality is a serious factor in the rise and maintenance of ethnic violence. This is evident their responses to questions on the economic dimension of the conflict. For instance, when interrogated on the motive behind the formation of violent ethnic militia organisations in the Niger Delta, the traditional ruler designated as 'Respondent A' had this to say:

> *The Niger delta demands which eventually turned into violent agitation that produced the militants started during the colonial period. At that time, it was basically an agitation for infrastructural facilities to be provided for them. However, by the independence era, and also with the discovery of crude oil*

in the region, their demands, and agitations obviously increased. Why? Because during the colonial era, their demands were not met, for the colonialist claimed that little or no resource came from there with which to address their requests. Now, the country entered an era where entire states of the federation depend on the region for its revenue, external foreign exchange. And yet, their demands were not still met. And so, their demands moved from mere requests and letter writing petitions, to going to court. It was after the futile 'going-to court' phase that it now degenerated into militancy. It is within that historical trajectory that the militants came on the scene. The failure of the authorities to address the issues earlier created the room for the emergence of militants. It was like having talked and talks failed, it was time to war. But very unfortunately, they have been socialised into a process where they have come to believe that when they shoot the guns, the authorities listen to them. (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria; April 2017; int. num. A)

Responding to a similar question, a member of the Bayelsa state House of Assembly otherwise known in this project as the **'int. num. C'** had this to say:

It all has to do with deprivation, economic deprivation. The entire scenario may be described in the following words: the goose that lay the golden egg does not even get to see the golden egg, not to talk of benefiting from it. This is what the people felt after some time, and affirmed that somethings must change. We cannot lay the golden egg, and some other person comes from millions of miles away to take control of it. This golden egg is what we call the petrol or the crude oil. Huge amount of money is made from the sale of this crude oil, but the proceeds are carted away from where it was made. The people of the Niger Delta are therefore left to suffer the dangerous impact of a carefree and unethical oil exploration. They felt excluded and therefore decided to agitate against the arrangement that has consistently excluded them. In Nigeria, we got independence in 1960. At independence, there was a constitution which had a revenue sharing formula that allows those from whose region the natural resources are extracted to take control of it, but remit a certain percentage to the centre (federal government). In the North, they had the groundnuts, in the south west they had the cocoa, in the South East, they had the palm oil. This revenue sharing formula was applicable in all these cases. But when oil was discovered the rule changed because the region where the oil was discovered was in the minority. So, they manipulated it to favour the majority. This was against the then constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This manipulation was done by promulgating the land use act that which declared that any resource located beyond six feet from the ground belongs to the Federal Government and not to the region. Invariably crude oil is among those resources that are located beyond six feet from the ground. So, the majority used this policy to syphon what ought to have come to us. This act was promulgated after oil had been found in the Niger Delta area. So, it was intentional. (Interview response by

a Member of Bayelsa state House of Assembly in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State Nigeria; June 2017; int. num. C)

These views (**int. nums. A and C**) clearly point to the economic dimension of the Niger Delta conflict; but beyond that, they also acknowledge, unlike '**Respondent B**', the causal impact of ethnicity in the rise and perpetuation of the regional violence. This thesis also argues that without the passion and cohesion generated by ethnicity, violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta, especially in its current form, would not exist; *de facto*, it happens mainly on the basis of ethnicity. So, the opinions of these respondents **(int. nums A and C)** are not only appropriate, but also in line with the views of established scholars of ethnic violence including Estaben *et al* (2012) Gurr and Harff (1994), as well as obviously with the Kaufmanian(2001; 2013) ethno-symbolic theory of ethnic violence - the theoretical framework within which this project has been framed. This demonstrates the active role of ethnicity in the Niger Delta's violent conflict.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork I quietly wondered why some of the respondents were not able to discern the causal relevance and role of ethnicity in the spiralling of the violent conflict. The conclusion that seemed obvious to me was that it must have been due to ignorance, negligence, or lack of familiarity with the historical circumstances that have led to the emergence of modern Nigerian ethnicity; and what implication the latter has for job opportunities, positions, wealth distribution and conflict, violent or otherwise. It is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to be familiar with these and still not perceive or establish some causal links between ethnicity and the onset and persistence of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta region. Given this, it becomes pertinent, or even necessary, to retrace and elaborate more on the origins and motives for the construction of 'modern ethnicity' in Nigeria, as well as its implication, especially in the Niger Delta region. The following sections therefore first trace the rise of a modern Nigerian ethnic identity, before discussing its implication for opportunities, wealth distribution, politics and conflict. This will lay to rest any iota of doubt about the causal contribution or role of ethnicity to the spiralling and sustenance of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta region.

Nigerian Ethnicity, Recent, Not Ancient

This section emphasises that ethnicities in Nigeria are of recent origin. It asks why they were created or constructed? For what purpose? In answering these questions, the true character of

modern Nigerian ethnicities and their implications for inter-ethnic economic competition and conflict are better understood.

Berman (1998)'s assertion that modern African ethnicity is a social construction of the colonial period applies to both Nigeria as a whole and to the Niger Delta region. Far from being a merely subjective adumbration, this is based on some verifiable historico-empirical research findings, and is therefore reliable.

Socio-political organisations of the ancient, or rather pre-colonial Nigerian societies, are significantly different from their modern variants. Large ethnic groups – a glaring feature of modern Nigeria, were non-existent in the country's pre-colonial era. Apart from the few 'porous' states (caliphate and empires) that existed during this time, pre-colonial Nigeria generally had a historical trajectory of kinship, that is, the idea of an extended family (Thompson 2010; Faloa *et al.* 2008). In theory, a kinship lineage could trace its past back to the same ancestral origin; and these bonds of origin bound the community together. Realistically however, actual ties are not a continuum; for outsiders are occasionally brought into the clan, and individuals marry off into other family lineages. This shows that kinship boundaries in pre-colonial Nigeria were, apart from being a socially constructed reality, also flexible; and this is contrary to the colonialists' primordialist description of ancient African (Nigerian) societies as based purely on biological descent (Berman 1998). Rules guiding interpersonal interactions in precolonial African societies were generally unwritten. They were rather handed down from one generation to the next through customary practices, folklore and oral tradition. Members of these groups understood and abided by them; and there were consequences for breaching them. The head of the community, usually the eldest male person understood generally as the main custodian of the community's unwritten laws, had a great deal of political power. Another significant feature of the precolonial kinship group was that it provided solidarity, justice, security, and welfare for its members. The wide range of support it provided increased and solidified people's attachment to and bonding with their communities (Horowitz 2000, Nnoli 2008). This was the nature of the pre-colonial Nigerian societies, including the Niger Delta region. Kinship, rather than ethnicity[3] was the basis for the socio-political ordering of the pre-colonial Nigerian societies. In fact, as Alagoa (1972) observes, there is no term corresponding to 'ethnicity' in the pre-colonial dictionary of the Niger Delta people. Ethnicity – a large collection of people believing themselves to be of the same ancestral

[3] Horowitz (2000:57) also defines ethnicity as the most extended form of kinship.

roots, was not a feature of the precolonial Nigerian societies; but rather a creation of the colonial period (Berman 1998; Nnoli 2008).

At this point, we are left with some important questions about how and why ethnicity was formed during the colonial times? Addressing these questions will necessitate, first and foremost, an understanding of the purpose and nature of the colonial state and colonial urban settings; for it is against this backdrop that one is able to properly comprehend the developmental process of modern Nigerian ethnicity, as well as its implication for wealth distribution and conflict. Thus, highlighting the connection between ethnicity and the Niger Delta conflict, which is the primary objective of this chapter. However, it is useful to begin with a few words on the character of the colonial urban setting.

The Colonial Urban Setting: The Cradle of Modern Nigerian Ethnicity

As mentioned above, Nigerian ethnicity as well as its relationship to politics, economy, and violence, has its origin in the colonial period. Prior to this time, Nigerians had no consciousness of belonging to large ethnicities as they do now. It was in colonial urban settings that Nigerians first acquired a common consciousness of their existence as members of ethnic groups. The colonial urban setting, as Nnoli (2008) describes it, is the cradle of ethnicity in Nigeria; and logically so, because the phenomenon of ethnicity cannot exist unless people from disparate cultural groups are in contact with one another within a specific location over a relatively long period of time.

In Nigeria, the colonial urban setting provided the locus for significant contact and interaction between members of the precolonial colonial cultural and linguistic formations and polities. Prior to the establishment of colonial urban centres in Nigeria, inter-rural migration for reasons such as work, trade, or farming provided an opportunity for contact between members of different precolonial cultural groups. However, these mobilities were usually on a small scale and were not significant for the emergence of ethnicity in the country. Records exist of some Igbo people migrating for work in cocoa and rubber plantations in the Igbira, Owo and Afemai communities. There are also reports of how migrants from various parts of pre-colonial Nigeria arrived to fish in the creeks and lagoons of Niger Delta area. There was certainly a fairly regular movement of migrants in Nigeria before colonialism; however, relative to the population of their host communities, the number of these migrants was usually quite small (less than one

percent) and did not cause any rupture in the socio-political and economic life of their host communities. This sort of contact was insignificant for the emergence of ethnicity, especially as the new arrivals were not perceived as threats capable of disrupting the communal cohesion of their host communities (Nnoli 2008). This being the case, there was therefore no need to activate and reinforce in-group (ethnic) consciousness and boundaries in order to exclude these new arrivals. The sort of relationship that existed between the migrants and their host communities was not that of inter-group competition, but of complementarity - thus eliminating group competition, which is usually at the heart of the growth of inter-ethnic consciousness and conflict. So, inter communal contacts and interactions in rural areas did not engender ethnicity in Nigeria or in the Niger Delta (Nnoli 2008). The level of contact significant for the emergence of the modern ethnicity in Nigeria, as mentioned above, occurred in the colonial urban setting, not in the rural communities.

The Colonial State and The Radical Transformation of Pre-Colonial Nigerian Traditional Societies

The common saying that necessity is the mother of invention seems to make sense when one critically reflects on the history and evolution of technology. The latter evolves as people attempt to creatively respond to the challenges and opportunities of their immediate environment. There is therefore an organic link between a physical environment and the pattern of inter-human relations that evolves as people originally and creatively explore and harness their resources to address their interests and needs. This organic or material link between the geographical environment and the developmental trajectories of a society has always been a central tenet of marxism (Martley 1966).

In Nigeria, colonialism disrupted this organic interdependence or link in various pre-colonial societies. How? To meet the British factories' demand for raw materials, the colonial state, described by Berman (1998) as 'an apparatus of authoritarian bureaucratic control' decided what crops should be prioritised and grown for export. If these were already being grown in Nigeria, they encouraged their increased production. If on the other hand they were not yet being cultivated, but the climatic and soil conditions were favourable, they introduced them from outside the country. For instance, for the production of soap in Britain, basic raw materials such as palm oil, palm kernel oil, peanut oil, and copra oil were required. For this reason, the colonialists encouraged and accelerated their cultivation in the south-eastern, and south-

southern parts of Nigeria. In the Northern part, the cultivation of peanuts was promoted and increased. The requisite oils were then extracted and exported for use by the Lux, Sunlight, and Lifebuoy soap factories in Britain, and other similar factories in Switzerland, USA, Germany, Belgium and Canada (Nnoli 2008). Quite naturally, ancillary industries relevant to the production and extraction of these raw materials were also developed - creating jobs which absorbed a vast majority of the local workforce (colonial manpower was limited). The consequence of this was the disruption of the local pattern of production and local consumption habits; for no attempt was made to design industries and activities relevant to the needs and taste of the local population. The indigenous work force, previously dedicated to catering for the needs of local Nigerian communities, were suddenly redeployed to produce goods and services to fulfil British capitalist needs, breaking the organic link that existed between the needs of pre-colonial societies and the means (technology) they creatively developed to harness their resources for their own benefit. Colonialism disrupted the pre-colonial Nigerian societies' gradual, organic, and more natural progression to modernity and technological advancement. This could not have been otherwise, for colonialism, as Berman (1998) observes, had a different agenda: economic exploitation of the colonised territory for its egoistic interest.

One outstanding feature of capitalism is the constant need to reduce cost and maximise surplus (Scott 2006; Ali 2006). The colonialists were capitalists *par excellence*; and as such, cutting costs and maximising outputs was one of the obvious modes of operation. In Nigeria, the colonialists' needed to constantly reduce the cost of administration and avoid overstretching their limited foreign manpower, which compelled them to concentrate or limit their activities to colonial enclaves or settings. The most significant of these enclaves were the colonial urban centres, described by Nnoli (2008) as the peripheral *nerve centres of imperialism*, mainly because it was from these centres that colonial organisational, manipulative and administrative activities and control occurred. From there they penetrated the nooks and crannies of the country, as well as its socio-political and economic life. The significant structural changes that took place in Nigeria during the colonial period occurred in the colonial urban centres. The growth, expansion, structural modification, and vibrancy of the colonial urban centres were stimulated and dominated by three major, but interrelated activities - those of British private business enterprises, British colonial government, and the missionaries. All these, especially the activities of firms, were instrumental in the structural modification and transformation of the country as a whole.

The British colonial economy was dominated by firms' investment capital, employment facilities, and general influence. Private trading firms were the most significant of these enterprises (Nnoli 2008). Quite early on, Mars (1948:58) described how the aggregate profit made by import-export trade in Nigeria in the 1930s was three times higher than that made in the mining sector. Private trading firms made their profit by simply purchasing and exporting agricultural goods from Nigerian middlemen for sale in Europe; and by importing a wide range of consumer service goods which were then sold to Nigerians either directly or through retailers. In this way, Nigeria was already well on its way to a non-productive economy which obviously stunted the development and growth of local industries that had previously and more organically produced for the local population. Importation of foreign consumer products changed local consumer taste and made the home economy dependent on a foreign one. Colonial private trading firms were instrumental in bringing about this significant change in Nigeria. By 1918, as Mabogunje (1968) argued, both British and European private firms, including UAC, African and Eastern Trade Corporation, B.B. Ollivant and Co., John Holt and Co., Ltd., and Société Commerciale et Industrielle de l'Afrique Occientale, and Miller Brothers, had already established their presence in Lagos and opened branches in Ibadan (another colonial urban centre). Because of the heavy consumer demand of the high-income earners, coupled with the concentration of the capitalist and administrative infrastructures, it was both practical and beneficial for firms to maintain their centre of operations in colonial urban settings. The colonial government kept expanding its urban enclaves as businesses and other relevant activities grew. In anticipation of high returns from new trading locations in the hinterland, and the need for increased political control of remote parts of the country, the colonial government embarked on the construction of roads and railways. Just as anticipated, by the time the railway reached Kano in northern Nigeria, the export of peanuts had increased significantly from 1,179 to 19,288 tons. In addition to this, the colonial government also engaged in the construction of harbours in Lagos and Port-Harcourt to boost export and import trade. It is important to emphasise that in all this activity the colonialists had no intention of systematically developing Nigeria. The forms of development that occurred in colonial urban centres were simply the unintended outcomes of the colonialists' well calculated and organised profit-making venture. The government policies and research projects promoted during this time were simply geared toward satisfying the colonial agricultural, industrial, and trading needs. The West African Institute for Palm Research and The West African Cocoa Research Institute are instances of such projects.

Following the growth and expansion of this beehive of activities, the colonial government needed proper centres of administration for effective control of the entire country. This led to the promulgation of the township ordinance in 1917 under which different categories of townships were created throughout the country (12 of them in the northern and southern parts of the country respectively). From there the colonialists maintained effective control of the socio-economic and political activities of Nigeria.

It needs to be mentioned that prior to colonialism urban areas existed in Nigeria, particularly in Ibadan, Abewokuta, Ifes, Oshogho, Ogbomoso, Kano, Zaria, Sokoto and Katsina. These pre-colonial urban areas, with small populations of between 20,000 and 70,000, naturally emerged as a result of growth in production that was well beyond the required need of the local population. The resulting surplus provided an opportunity for a complex division of labour in which individuals, in addition to agriculture, specialised in other sectors of the local economy such as crafts, medicine, trade, and administration. Generally, the production of goods and services during the pre-colonial era was inspired and guided by the local population's tastes and consumption patterns. This is quite unlike production in the colonial period which occurred, not to satisfy the local demands of Nigerians, but rather the demands of the British and European capitalist market (Nnoli 2008).

Among the features concentrated in the newly created colonial towns were wage employment, hospitals, small scale businesses, education (provided mainly by missionaries), water and electricity supply, although they were very limited in relation to the population of the country as a whole. Township status soon became the parameter that guided the distribution of social amenities and services during this era. The activities of firms, missionaries and colonial administrators became a massive centripetal force that pulled many able-bodied men to the urban centres. Paden (1971) observes that Kano's population grew by 26.8 percent between 1911 and 1921- a figure that had tripled again by 1952. This sudden migration to the colonial urban centres and towns weakened the equilibrium of the traditional pre-colonial Nigerian societies as they began to lose the manpower that had previously sustained their traditional industries and institutions to the colonial urban centres, especially to make up for the limited foreign labour in these centres. Closely examined, it may be sustainably defended that this mass movement of people to the colonial urban centres and towns was not entirely voluntary. The needs and pressure of the new order compelled them to move where they would otherwise have preferred to remain in the highly cherished ambience of their traditional communities. Imoagene (1974) points out that earlier migrants to colonial urban areas retained their

traditional system of values and maintained regular contacts with their families and village communities. Although they lived in the town, their hearts remained with their traditional village communities, which they visited frequently still participating in nearly all their major events. The towns were simply a place to earn money and then return eventually to their villages. Offegbu captured these inner tensions well when he wrote:

> *...their emotional and sentimental attachments are not with the urban communities, but with their home towns. Hence, they are willing to endure any hardship deprivations, and suffering in the towns without protesting because they feel their stay is temporary and essentially instrumental. (1977:16)*

It is interesting to observe that Ofoegbu also talked about the temporary predicaments that these earlier township dwellers may have had to endure. This, as Nnoli (2008) highlights, was mainly because the colonial urban centres were not designed to be a place of glamorous habitation and integration for the new migrants from rural areas, but rather grew out of the need to meet colonial economic and political objectives. The physical amenities available in the urban centres were provided primarily because they were either directly or indirectly relevant to colonial trade, administration, and political control, not because they were tailored towards assisting new migrants readjust to a new set of values. The situation in the colonial urban settings created some sort of ambivalence in these earlier migrants. Ukiwo (2005:8) citing Nnoliamply describes this scenario thus:

> *Having been uprooted from the pre-colonial setting which had valid meaning for him, in which history had effectively and organically related him to his local environment, and culture had produced salutary patterns of interactions with others, the African migrant found the door to the coloniser's glorified world securely barred to him. The resultant anomie and alienation affected his socio-economic and political activities. Even in interactions with his fellow Africans, he experienced tension, anxiety, and insecurity… . (1978: 22)*

So, the nature of the colonial urban setting was that it was never a locus in which the migrants from the rural areas ever fully settled and felt at home. Therefore, this sort of migration was never voluntary, even though colonialists and some analysts tend to view it as such. They fail to acknowledge the compulsion that was directly linked to the introduction and enforcement of British legal tender (money) as the only means of economic exchange, especially as one could neither sell nor buy goods and services in the new order except by means of legal British money. This situation forced Nigerians to gradually give up trade by barter (a traditional way

of exchanging goods and services) and engage in colonial activities in order to acquire this new means of livelihood, namely, British money. The following British policies: an alien currency, forced labour, taxation and artificial scarcity - forced a huge number of the rural population to migrate to the zones of new colonial activities for work or trade, as only a handful of Nigerians could fend for themselves and their families by performing their pre-colonial work or activities. This was the common experience of pre-colonial traditional Nigerian societies, including the pre-colonial Niger Delta region.

Differential Urban Migration, A Favourable Condition for The Emergence of Ethnicity in Nigeria

Both the booming colonial economy and the mass influx of migrants from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to the colonial urban areas created the opportunity for the emergence of ethnic consciousness in Nigeria (Nnoli 2008). Green (1974: 288) reports that between 1952 and 1963, an estimated number of 644,000 migrants from a variety of linguistic backgrounds streamed into the metropolis of Lagos in south-western Nigeria. This accounts for about 59,000 migrants annually arriving from the Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw (of the Niger-Delta area) and Hausa speaking areas of the pre-colonial Nigeria. At the same time, that is, between 1952 and 1963, approximately 129,989 migrants from the South poured into some of the colonial urban centres of Northern Nigeria such as Kano, Jos, Zaria, and Kaduna. According to Nnoli (2008) most of these migrants to the North (88.6 percent) were from the South-East, which is predominantly an Igbo speaking region of Nigeria. Some were also from the Igbo speaking part of the Niger Delta. Having arrived, these migrants went either into industries, mining or commerce, or other job possibilities available in these colonial urban settings. It was in these urban towns that significant contact or interaction amongst migrants from various linguistic backgrounds took place. Such contact is a pre-requisite for the emergence of ethnicity; for ethnicity exists only when there is more than one group (identified as ethnic) at least occupying a particular territory. The colonial urban setting made clusters of different culturally and linguistically groups possible. This is a necessary condition for the emergence of ethnicity. This point becomes clearer when one considers the sort of migration that occurred in the south-eastern and south-southern parts of Nigeria during the colonial period. The colonial urban centres of Onitsha, Aba, and Port-Harcourt (in the Niger Delta area), just like those in the West and North, also received a number of migrants between 1952 and 1963. But unlike these latter areas, migrants

came primarily from one linguistic group - the Igbo people indigenous to these areas. No significant contact or interaction with any other linguistic groups was therefore possible there. For this reason, ethnicity could not be developed in either Onitsha, Aba or Port-Harcourt. Post-colonial Nigeria is notorious for its inter-ethnic violent clashes, but it is interesting to observe that most of these clashes have occurred in places with a high concentration of members of other ethnic groups. A close examination of the inter-ethnic clashes of 1932 and 1945 in Jos, 1948 in Lagos, 1953 in Kano, 1966 in Kaduna, up to the present day supports this claim (see Nnoli 2008, Falola 2008, Salawu 2010; Tawarikh 2013). Rarely has any major inter-ethnic clash occurred in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. The reason is very simple. The non-indigenous population there is insignificant in comparison to the local population, making it difficult for ethnicity to develop. Whatever semblance of ethnic conflict that may have taken place in the South-East and South-South is usually reactionary, as they express their grievance at home over the bad that may have been done to their kinsmen in other parts of the country. Against this background, it is easier to understand the pervasive implication or involvement of the Igbo-speaking people of Nigeria in many of the significant interethnic conflicts that have occurred across Nigeria. More than any other linguistic group, the Igbo speaking population, both of the South-East and of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, migrated in large numbers to most colonial urban settings and to date continues to migrate for both work and trade.

Resource Competition in the Colonial Urban Setting and The Construction of Ethnicity in Nigeria

From the foregoing, it is evident that the concentration and interaction of multifarious cultural and linguistic groups in the colonial urban settings is a necessary pre-condition for the fomenting of ethnicity. But contact alone does not satisfactorily explain why ethnicity forms. The element of competition over scarce resources is very important in offering a more robust explanation. Earlier in this chapter, following Dike (1956), I highlighted a number of instances in which contact between different cultural or linguistic groups occurred, but which did not necessarily lead to the emergence of ethnicity. Thomson (2010) also notes that there were some cases of assimilation among certain pre-colonial African societies. For instances, there was a case of assimilation between the Igbo and Ijaw of the Niger-Delta area in the pre-colonial era (Dike, 1956). All this indicates that it is not in all cases that contact or interaction between different culturally and linguistically distinct groups leads to the formation of ethnicity. If

ethnicity developed in the colonial urban setting in Nigeria, it was primarily because of the socio-economic competition that existed there. Competition over scarce resources is usually a reason for the activation, reinforcement and instrumentalisation of ethnic consciousness and boundaries. Nowhere is this view more eloquently expressed than in the writings of some of the well-known resource-based theorists of ethnic conflict such as Collier and Hoeffler (2001). Competition over scarce resources is the dominant feature of the colonial urban setting. Jobs and relevant trade, as well as the social amenities available in the colonial urban area were, relative to the ever-growing local population streaming into them, very limited. This sort of scarcity, which usually emerges when the demand for available vital goods and services is significantly higher than their supply, forced people to compete fiercely over access to limited resources in the urban centres.

Furthermore, by importing the capitalist mode of production into Nigeria from outside, Colonialism ushered in a period of significant scarcity in the country. Unemployment and limited access to the decision-making quarters are some of the prominent ways in which this scarcity manifested itself. In the first instance, the colonial capitalist economy disrupted the pre-colonial modes of production in which the local population were gainfully employed and replaced it with a capitalist production mode which was entirely alien to the pre-colonial Nigerian societies. This stunted the viability of local modes of production and rendered many previously gainfully employed Nigerians jobless (Nnoli 2008). During the colonial era, opportunities for Nigerians to participate in political processes, especially the formulation of national policies, were severely limited. Europeans dominated all the sectors of colonial Nigeria's politics and economy. Struggle for access to scarce employment and extremely limited political positions contributed to the fomenting of contemporary ethnic sentiment as people aligned along ethnic or ethno-linguistic lines for effective competition.

In 1920, Nigerians express their dissatisfaction over the scarcity of jobs and opportunities for political office through the National Congress of British West Africa, which called for a legislative council meeting in which half of its members would be nominated (Nnoli 2008). Between 1922 and 1946, the status quo hardly changed. The number of Nigerians occupying relevant political office was still quite small in comparison to their European counterparts. It was not until 1951, under the McPherson Constitution that a glimmer of hope appeared on the horizon as 12 individuals, out of the 18-man council of ministers formed at the federal level, were Nigerians. Only six were colonial officials. In addition to this, 136 other Nigerians were also elected to the Federal House of Representatives. Later on, in 1958, the universal adult

suffrage which allowed adults to vote and be voted for was adopted across the entire country except the North, where women were disallowed voting rights on religious grounds. The North was predominantly Islamic. In 1960, Nigeria gained political independence, but even then, the foundation and shape of its political economy for decades to come had been solidly laid during the colonial period.

The foregoing shows that scarcity was pervasive in colonial Nigeria - manifesting itself in every sector of the country's socio-economic and political life. Under such condition, competition became very fierce as people struggled to gain access to the limited economic and political opportunities available. To secure their interests and enhance their chances of success, migrants to colonial urban settings aligned themselves more closely with others of similar ethno-linguistic backgrounds (Sofola 1970). Kinship groups and communal unions such as the Naze Family Meeting, Ngwa Clan Union, Owerri Divisional Union, Calabar Improvement league, Egba society, Yoruba Union, and Ijaiye National society, among others, were formed for this purpose in the colonial urban centres during the 1920s and beyond. These groups were usually very cohesive and their members usually supportive. Once a member of a particular group was fortunate to gain access to a good job or position, or resources, they used this to find employment for others, or at least to point them in the right direction. The consequence of this is ethno-linguistic inequality in employment and income which further inflames ethnic rancour and animosity in the groups that lag behind (Nnoli 2008).

The scenario just described shows that inter-ethnic animosity is usually constructed around competition over scarce resources. Contrary to the view of the primordialists, its origin is rationally explainable. It is not biological. Ethnic identity was therefore a big issue for colonial urban dwellers, but less so (or even not at all) for those in rural areas whose population is mainly homogenous. In the rural pre-colonial setting, although there was contact and interaction between different social groups, the need for ethnicity did not arise because the nature of their relationship usually did not involve competition over resources. Access to food and other vital resources was quite secure; even if these were not always as superabundantly available as one would always want, the basic needs of the community were nearly always satisfactorily met. Their interactions were based on complementarity of interests, or superordination and subordination, not on competition. Anytime a pre-colonial host community employed migrant labourers, there was often a non-verbal mutual understanding of the host community's dominance, and the labourers' subservience or subordination. This eliminates unhealthy competition and the insecurity that arises out of the possibility of being

prevented, when dominated or outcompeted, from accessing vital human needs. It was only in the colonial urban settings where vital resources were not only scarce, but fiercely competed for, that people aligned along communal lines to maximise their chances of winning (Nnoli 2008). So, the development of ethnicity requires the existence of a high concentration of different ethno-linguistic groups in a specific geographical area. Colonial urban settings in Nigeria were this type of territory.

This section has shown that ethnicity gradually became salient in the colonial urban setting as individuals aligned themselves along ethnic-linguistic lines to favourably compete for access to highly sought-after but limited resources, opportunities and positions of authority. It simply became politicized.

Politicisation of Ethnicity in Nigeria

Ethnicity is said to be politicised when peoples' belief in their imagined collective origin, based on a set of common attributes such as language, culture, physical appearance or history relevantly influences the state's political processes and outcomes. Ethnicity must enter the formal realm of politics to count as politicised (Weber, Hiers and Flesken 2016). This section briefly explores how modern Nigerian ethnicity, whose foundation was laid in the colonial period, continues to be salient in post-colonial Nigeria's political processes, in the distribution of state's values and resources, and its implication for violent ethnic mobilisation. The aim is to demonstrate, contrary to the views of some of my interview respondents, that ethnicity did play a significant role in the spiralling of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta and continues to do so.

That the inter-communal relations between different linguistic groups migrating to colonial urban centres were not smooth has already been mentioned. It was fraught with favouritism for one's own ethno-linguistic group in employment and access to political positions as individuals aligned themselves along ethnic lines in order to further strengthen their ability to overcome the alienation and challenges of the colonial urban settings. These alignments mostly led to the formation of ethnic unions and associations whose members were mutually supportive (Nnoli, 2008). The internal cohesion of these ethnic assemblages impeded them from merging, or creatively interacting with others in the colonial urban centres for there existed some sort of baseless bias that only those thought to be of a shared common history, language or origin

could be trusted and collaborated with. This covert distrust of others partly accounted for why individuals formed alliances mostly with those of a similar ethno-linguistic background. Aligning with them felt like a return to, or rather, a recreation of the more secure, familiar and gratifying type of life they had led in their respective traditional societies prior to their migration to the 'jungle life' of colonial urban settings (Nnoli 2008). This way of thinking and acting reinforces ethnic boundaries and identities, encourages ethnocentrism and exclusionism. Consequently, it hampers interethnic cooperation, nation-building and development in an ethnically divided society such as Nigeria. Although Nigeria got her independence in 1960, not much has changed with regard to peoples' tendency to align themselves along ethnic lines, especially for the purposes of advancing either their economic, and/or political objectives (Ukiwo 2005). In 2019, many years since the formal end of colonialism in Nigeria, nearly all the key political appointments of President Buhari (the current president of Nigeria) are still from his own ethnic group (Opejobi 2017). Why he has avoided appointing a significant number of peoples from other ethnic backgrounds is partly explained by the view presented above. As far as Nigeria is concerned, ethnicity still matters, and continues to intrude into politics. Just as in the colonial urban settings, modern Nigerians have also come to believe widely, though erroneously, that unless their 'own people' are in power, they will constantly be disadvantaged in the government's distribution of the political and economic values of the state. They generally share, even if unconsciously, Laswell's (1936) definition of politics as who gets what, how and when. The awareness that political power enables its wielders to authoritatively allocate the socio-political and economic values of the state constantly motivates ethnic groups to align behind their 'own members' to seize political powers, in anticipation of being rewarded or favoured in political appointments, and of the award of contracts, job offers, and infrastructures. This is simply called ethnic politics. A theme also extensively addressed in Berman (1998) is the inward-looking orientation that characterised ethno-linguistic groups during and after colonialism, on the one hand, reinforced ethnic groups' internal cohesion and loyalty, but also, on the other hand, increased the exclusion and marginalisation of other similar groups (out-groups). Some of the logical consequences of this are a massive retardation of the formation and development of collective national consciousness, a heightening of unhealthy inter-ethnic competition over access to political power and scarce economic resources, the widening of socio-economic and political inequalities due to differential access to the state's values (resources and positions), and finally a proliferation of inter-ethnic conflict (both of a violent and nonviolent nature) as groups that are disadvantaged in the polity agitate. As early as 1958, Coleman (1958: 219) noted these

divisive ethnic tendencies as well as their negative implications for the Nigerian state. He therefore advised Nigerians to 'seek coordination among themselves (disparate ethnic formations) in a way that would help build a strong national consciousness'. Despite this admonition, and a number of attempts to heed it, politicised ethnicity continues to impact on many spheres of Nigeria's life. As Berman (1998) observes, the influence of ethnicity on African politics cannot be reasonably negated.

It is within the context of such obvious instrumentalisation and politicisation of ethnicity for socio-economic and political gains, coupled with the socio-economic inequalities that this generates, that one is able to better understand the rise of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta – a region often making reference to its socio-economic and political marginations as the major reason for violent agitation. The next section examines the ethnic dimension of the Niger Delta conflict.

Highlighting the Ethnic Dimension of the Niger Delta Conflict

The Niger Delta region is home to some of the minority ethnic groups of Nigeria. In comparison to the so-called majority ethnic groups such as the Igbo, Hausa or Yoruba, the population of the Niger Delta region is quite small. As discussed in earlier chapters, the region has a documented history of being disadvantaged or marginalised in the distribution of the socio-economic and political values of the Nigerian state. This is partly because, in Nigerian Democracy, where an ethnic group's numerical strength is vital in pushing through its agenda, the interests of minority groups are often not advanced because they lack the numerical strength required to push through their ethnic interests at national level (Ogbogbo 2005; 2008). This is exactly one of the challenges facing the Niger Delta region. The unequal access of Nigerian ethnic groups to the scarce socio-economic and political resources and opportunities of the country causes the often-disadvantaged ethnic categories of the Niger Delta to agitate - employing both violent and non-violent means.

The connection between economic inequalities and conflict is well known among scholars of ethnic and national violence. The economic inequality theory of ethnic violence, otherwise known as reactive ethnicity, is an outstanding scholarly effort to articulate this widely known relationship between economic marginalisation or exclusion, and conflict. The reactive ethnicity perspective often associated with Michael Hechter (1975) holds that ethnic conflict is

the result of economic imbalances or inequalities existing between different ethnic blocs within an ethnically divided state. The widening economic gap due to socio-economic deprivation of particular ethnic blocs leads, over time, to grievances on the part of the disadvantaged group which, when not properly managed, often escalate into violent inter-ethnic confrontation. A similar approach was also successfully employed by Bonacich (1972) to explain the onset of ethnic conflict due to variations in pay for the same occupation, when people of different ethnic origins competed in the same labour market. This is the well-known 'split labour market theory'. Before Hechter and Bonacich, earlier scholars such as Davies (1962) and Gurr (1970) developed models that suggest that an intolerable gap between expected socio-economic goods, and what is actually received, increases peoples' willingness to rebel. So perceived deprivation, they argue, inspires ethnic protest and even violent confrontation. In most developing countries, structural economic inequalities have been linked to large scale inter-ethnic confrontations and revolutions (Russett, 1964; Muller and Seligson 1987, Regan and Norton 2005). Reliable research on the causes of ethnic violence in the Niger-Delta often refers to a long history of socio-economic deprivation and marginalisation in the region as a major driver of ethnic violence in the area (Obi, et al, 2011). All the respondents interviewed in the Niger Delta region concurred with this view.

This widespread belief by the Niger Deltans that their minority status in Nigeria has somewhat condemned them to perpetually remain victims of marginalisation within the polity is a provocation to violent mobilisation along ethnic lines as a way of forcing the Nigerian state to address the injustices (perceived or actual) they suffer as an ethnic group. Surprisingly, ever since the Niger Delta region embraced the use of violence as a political pressure tool, the Nigerian state has lost a lot of money to oil bunkering, and to destruction of oil production and transportation facilities. These losses have forced the Nigerian government back to the negotiating table. Today, these issues are among the major subjects discussed and taken seriously at the national level. Although the solutions needed have not yet been found and violent conflict continues to occur in the region, Niger Delta is no longer absent from the list of major issues of the Nigerian state.

It is noteworthy that to be able to mobilise and challenge the ages-long marginalisation of the region, the Niger Deltans had recourse to ethnicity(ethnic myth/symbol complexes). Adunbi (2013; 2015) paints a picture of how the Ilaje community of the Niger Delta taps into ethnic myths/symbol to successfully mobilize ethnic youths to violence against Chevron oil company operating on their territory. Ilaje people of the Niger Delta trace their origin back to Ile-Ife in

the South-western part of Nigeria. Their ancestors, following a defeat in war, were forced to migrate to the oil producing area of the Niger Delta where they currently occupy. The Ilaje people have a number of popular ethnic myth that describe their migration to the oil-rich Niger Delta as an act of 'God', who had promised to bequeath their ancestors with wealth and fortune. The eventual discovery of oil in commercial quantity in the region is mythically understood by the Ilaje people as the fulfilment of that promise made by 'God' to their ancestors. These myths are captured and kept alive in stories, folksongs, symbols, and divination poetry still in use in by the people to date. Thanks to these myths and symbolic gestures, the people of Ijaje (and its constituent towns such as Ugbo and Mahin amongst others) are able to lay claim to the so-called ancestral homeland they currently occupy, as well as to all the resources found in it. For them, both the land, and oil resources in it, are symbolic – they represent the treasure bequeathed on them by both 'God' and their ancestors. As observed by Adunbi (2013), this ethnic myth/symbol complexes are often reconstructed to mobilize the ethnic population, or a portion of it, to violence against the oil companies and the Federal government of Nigeria who try to forcefully dispossess them of that which rightly belongs to them – their land and their oil resources. The well-known Parabe turmoil in which Chevron, an oil company operating in the region, was attacked is an instance of this. The involvement, later on, of the Nigerian military forces in the crisis resulted in a number of deaths. In this scenario, one encounters a case of how the activation of ethnicity (ethnic myth/symbol complexes) helps mobilize an ethnically cohesive population to violence.

Ethnic cohesion in the Niger Delta is generally quite high. The people of the Niger Delta identify more strongly with their ethnic groups than with the political entity called Nigeria. This strong sense of ethnic identity and cohesion, as Gurr (1994) observes and as is clear from the case of Ilaje described above, is extremely important for the mobilisation of an ethnic group to collective action. Ethnic myths, passion and cohesion were the elements tapped into by Niger Delta elites to successfully stir the ethno-regional population of the Niger Delta to violent uprising against both the Nigerian government and the oil companies. As observed by one of my interview respondents (a traditional ruler interviewed in Port Harcourt, Rivers State), it was ethnic passion and solidarity that motivated individuals to generously avail their communities of the finance and resources needed to challenge the Nigerian government over the socioeconomic and political injustices of the region. There is therefore no doubt that if ethnic myths, solidarity and cohesion were missing, the violent ethnic mobilisation currently occurring in the Niger Delta region would not exist at all; for ethnicity, not class, was, and still

remains, the organising principle of collective violent action there. Membership of the numerous violent ethnic militias in the region is also on the basis of ethnicity. In fact, the Niger Delta violent mobilisation cannot be fully explained without reference to ethnicity.

So, when modernist (constructivist and instrumentalist) scholars such as Fearon and Laitin (2003), and some of my interview respondents downplay or entirely negate the contribution of ethnicity to the generation and sustenance of violent conflict, it simply betrays a poor understanding of the dynamics of ethnic violence. While this thesis agrees with Fearon and Laitin (2003), and other scholars of the constructivist and instrumentalist tradition mentioned in earlier chapters, that there is an economic dimension to the Niger Delta conflict, the latter cannot be fully understood without considering the important role of ethnicity in the emergence and persistence of that ethno-regional violence. This position is also evident in the work of Estaben *et al*. (2012) who argue that the widespread understanding that economic inequality is a driver of conflict is rational for it is quite natural to anticipate that the poor may harbour strong antagonisms against the rich. These antagonisms or resentments are, however, only part of the story. For a sustained violent conflict to occur, these antagonisms need to be channelled into organised actions, often a herculean task when economic powers or strength are so disparate, and the poor are faced with the challenge of financing such actions. Effectively, while economic inequalities breed grievances and resentments, the very poverty of the have-nots is a real obstacle that militates against successful and sustained violent mobilisation and attacks on the rich. It is for this reason that Estaben *et al.* (2012) conclude that although violent conflict may originate from economic motivations, they find expression through the cleavages generated by ethnicity, religion, or national origins. These cleavages are effective bases for mobilising for collective action. The same applies to the violent conflict in the Niger Delta. In the absence of ethnic identity, ethnic myths, ethnic passion, ethnic cohesion and solidarity, the ethnic groups of the Niger Delta would not be able to sustainably mobilise violently against either the federal government or the oil companies. The poverty of the region would have seriously militated against their sustained violent confrontation with the exceptionally rich and influential multinationals and the Nigerian government. The role of ethnicity as a motivational and mobilisational tool in the Niger Delta violent conflict cannot be negated or dismissed with a wave of hand.

So Kaufman (2001), whose ethno-symbolic theory has been the guide for this project, is correct in his claims that violent ethnic conflict requires the following preconditions: ethnic myth (ethnicity), a clash of interests, and elite manipulation. Across various chapters of this thesis, I

have been able to demonstrate how these elements dynamically interact with one another to generate and sustain the violent ethnic conflict that currently ravages the Niger Delta region. It is the position of this thesis that any attempt to resolve the conundrum of the Niger Delta conflict must take into consideration the impacts of the aforementioned factors. Otherwise complete resolution of this regional turmoil will continue to be elusive.

Class Struggle?: On How not to Evaluate the Niger Delta Conflict

Class struggle as a source of conflict is one of the core themes addressed by Marxism. One of the conclusions reached by Schmidt (1977) in his work: *A Marxist theory of Class Struggle* is that class divisions and struggles still constitute an important and relevant framework for examining social conflict, violent or otherwise, in the contemporary world. This assumption was clearly on the mind of a colleague who during a conference in which an aspect of this thesis was presented, wondered why the Marxist notion of class struggle, as well as its possible causal impact on violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta has not been elaborately discussed in this project. His observation provoked the need to clarify the question of the possible role of class in the Niger Delta violent conflict – since other Marxist readers of this document may have the same question. The following pages therefore outline an understanding of Marx's conception of class division and its implication for conflict in capitalist societies, and consider whether or not the Marxist theory of class is appropriate for understanding and explaining the phenomenon of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta region.

From the writings of Marx, one learns of the extraordinary existential importance of economics (the mode of production), which according to him, is the foundation of both political and social life. A society's economic structure underlies and shapes it social, political, and legal systems (Marx 1848). However, to fully appreciate the epistemological import of this assertion, some degree of conversance with Marxist anthropology is needed. Marx's understanding and interpretation of the nature of man starts with 'human needs'. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1884, he writes that man, a natural and living being, is on one hand endowed with natural powers - appetites that are intrinsic to him. On the other hand, however, the objects of these powers or appetites (that is, the material things required to meet human needs) exist outside and independently of him. Yet he needs these for his self-realisation and fulfilment.

Human history therefore becomes a continuous attempt or effort to satisfy certain primary needs, actualising natural human potentialities in the course of which, humans discover themselves as productive beings, who through their labours meet their needs and become fully human. Viewed from this angle, human labour becomes a source of liberation and fulfilment. This, however, is not the case in a capitalist society, which according to Marx alienates individuals from the fruits of their labour. This alienation originates from Marxist understanding of the capitalist society as divided into two antagonistic classes: the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat* locked against each other in perpetual conflict of interest. The bourgeoisie are the owners of the factors and means of production, while the proletariat are the workers. The latter own nothing except their own labour which they provide to the bourgeoises in exchange for wages that barely meet their needs, thus rendering them dependent on the exploitative whims and caprices of the bourgeoisie. The harder the proletariats work to break free and be fulfilled, the more the bourgeoisie utilise every possible avenue (especially institutional) to perpetuate the cycle of domination and exploitation existing between the social classes. The socio-political and legal institutions of capitalist society are, according to Marx, instruments of bourgeois domination and exploitation of the proletariat (the have nots). Within the capitalist economy, human labour, rather than being a source of liberty and fulfilment, becomes torturous and enslaving. The proletarian realisation of their own exploitation eventually causes them to revolt against the bourgeoisie. This, in other words, is the *class struggle* which, according to Marx, is at the origin of conflict, violent or otherwise, in capitalist societies. The end of this class struggle and its associated conflict is seen in a classless society ushered in by a proletarian revolution. Whether there will ever be a classless human society, as Marx predicted, is very doubtful, and certainly not supported by what is known about the natural human propensity to accumulate wealth and dominate others as evident in the Hobbesian theory of a state of nature (Hobbes 1651).

That there exists some correlation between exploitation (by the bourgeoisie) and conflict (caused by the proletarian reaction to bourgeois exploitation) is supported by verifiable historical facts. The French revolution is an example. Although the causes of French revolution are very complex, historians are nonetheless unanimous on the view that the scandalous privileges enjoyed by the upper class or the bourgeoisie of French society, as well as the enslaving and exploitation of the proletariat certainly constituted a major trigger of that rebellion. It was hoped that through that rebellion, a more liberal and humane French society would be ushered in – one that embodied the famous motto of the French republic: *liberté,*

egalité, and fraternité (Dunn 1999; Tombs *et al.,* 2007). Although the French revolution did eventually bring an end to the *Ancien Régime*, facilitating the country's embrace of democracy in which people had a say over how they are ruled, nothing suggests that as a result of the revolution, France became a perfectly egalitarian society devoid of class conflict and exploitation. Semblances of the French revolution portraying the correlation between antagonistic social class divisions in the capitalist system have also been seen around the globe. Class division, an obvious feature of a capitalist society, does constitute, as Marx argued, a source of social conflict.

However, any attempt to analyse social conflict in Africa using the Marxist theory of class ought to be done very carefully- for there is always a difficulty in exporting Marxism to Africa. Some scholars, especially if they are unfamiliar with the socio-political issues and events in Africa, are too quick to examine violent conflict on the continent using the Marxist theoretical framework. Diamond (1988), one of the most erudite scholars to have written on the Nigerian political conflict, employed the notion of class quite frequently in describing and analysing politically salient violent conflict in the country. In Chapter nine of his work *Class Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria* for example, he intermittently made reference to either the political "class" or the working "class" as though this Marxist terminology accurately captures Nigeria's socio-political relations. Although one can reasonably imagine the basic information he tries to convey, that is, the need to demonstrate that Nigerian society is not an egalitarian one devoid of power imbalance and exploitation, his use of the term Marxist term 'class' to explain the country's socio-political relations could be misleading. It should be emphasised, first of all, that class as understood by Marx forms in relation to the means of production (Thomson, 2004: 83). The world that Marx examined was the European capitalist society and economy, which according to him was partitioned into two antagonistic classes: the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*. It was not the African continent and certainly, neither Nigeria nor the Niger Delta. Africa has not been fully penetrated by the capitalist mode of production, and there has been no real industrial revolution on the continent. To this effect, the classical notion of class associated with the capitalist mode of production is also absent (Thomson, 2004: 85). This explains why the Marxist term "class" as used by Diamond to describe social relations in Nigeria is not very appropriate.

Social relations and conflict dynamics in Africa and Nigeria are much more convoluted than the way they are presented by some Marxist scholars. They are usually a complex mixture of both the traditional and modern, of both the pre-capitalist and capitalist modes (Thomson,

2004: 83). The so-called ruling or political class in Nigeria is a hegemonic bloc formed by assembling influential individuals and groups who are willing to cooperate with a view to seizing the state's power for personal gains. It has little or nothing to do with class solidarity as described by Marx, but rather more to do with the 'willingness to cooperate with strategic allies in order to obtain more of the spoils associated with the state' (Thomson, 2004: 87). This accounts for why admission into the ruling class in Africa, including Nigeria, could easily be extended to family members, friends and people of diverse socio-cultural or academic background in so far as they are willing to cooperate. In Africa, 'class' formation or allegiance is very capricious. It keeps changing and shifting as often as a better and more strategic coalition for exploiting the state's resources becomes available. This is exactly what happens in the Niger Delta conflict. For instance, some of the ex-militants who made their money fighting for 'justice' quickly became uninterested in continuing the cause they once championed and are now enjoying their spoils in comfort. This reality was captured well by one response to the following question: 'There are speculations that the militants themselves have become rich as a result of their activities. If this is correct, do you think that the militants would ever want peace to reign since their struggles already bring them some financial benefits? His insightful response was as follows:

> *Well that is where you have talk about the corruptive influence of the state and the oil companies. Rather than address the critical issues that the militants are raising, there is an attempt to compromise the key figures in the struggle. And so, they award them bogus contracts, make large sums of money available to them. These militants become very comfortable and a good number of them abandon the struggle. However, there is a pool of other militants waiting to take over, because the original issues had not been addressed. And so, there is a sense in which you can talk about the militant economy, in which it pays harass the state or the oil company and force them to settle (make money available to them). The amount of money in question is so substantial that militancy becomes more beneficial than going to find a genuine type of employment. They have been wrongly socialised, and a good number have gotten used to it. (Interview response by a traditional ruler in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria; April 2017; int. num. A)*

Social relations and conflict dynamics in Nigeria and the Niger Delta are not about class, but about willingness to cooperate in the informal, albeit highly organised network of looting the state's resources. The Marxist notion of class is therefore not a relevant factor or element in understanding and explaining the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region. Seeking to understand this regional turmoil from a strictly Marxist perspective is bound to be misleading.

Having said this, the current research does recognise that the Niger Delta is not a strictly egalitarian society, that is, one in which everyone is equal. Some are certainly wealthier than others, but generally, the boundaries between the rich and the poor are very unstable and hyper-fluid, unlike the relatively stable class distinctions described by Marx. In Nigeria, including the Niger Delta, having the right political association and network could make one incredibly rich within a very short space of time. In the same manner, a previously wealthy person could easily become indigent by simply falling out of favor with the political network that supports and protects him. In Nigeria, politics is a central focus for rapid wealth accumulation; not ownership of the means of production – for capitalism is ill-developed in the country. Again, in the Niger Delta, there exist traditional rulers or leaders, as well as the masses, that is, the led. This is another form of social stratification in the Niger Delta region. But as stated in the background chapter of this thesis, criteria for membership of this upper echelon of Niger Delta society is not based on wealth or ownership of means of production as is the case in Western capitalist society described by Marx; but rather on the principle of gerontocracy in which society is governed by wise elderly people generally considered to be custodians of society's values, customs and traditions. In the Niger Delta, being a traditional ruler is not tantamount to being wealthy. In fact, some traditional rulers, including some of those interviewed during my fieldwork, are not wealthy people. However, when it comes to the issue of collectively challenging the perceived injustices perpetuated against the region by the federal government of Nigeria, both rich and poor as well as elites have been involved, perhaps also for some slightly different hidden agendas. This mobilisation for collective action cuts across all social stratifications. It is a collective exercise in which ethnicity, not 'class', has played an important role as a principle of mobilisation. There is certainly an economic dimension to this regional violence (the region claims it has been marginalised economically), but class distinction hardly serves as the basis for mobilisation, unlike the example of the French revolution presented above. It is for this reason that this thesis continues to maintain that the Marxist notion of class in neither an appropriate nor reliable theoretical framework for understanding and resolving the Niger Delta violent conflict.

Conclusion

This chapter was designed to examine extant theories and debates on the causal role of ethnicity (ethnic myth-symbol complexes) in the generation and maintenance of violent ethnic mobilisation, not only within academia, but also, among those who responded to my questions

during my data collection exercise in the Niger Delta. In the course of performing this task, I came to observe that there existed some sort of binary in the opinions expressed by key academic contributors to the debate. For instance, while some, especially the proponents of the economy and resource-based theories of ethnic violence such as Fearon and Laitin (2003), Collier and Hoeffler (2000) and Muller and Seligson (1987), downplay, or outright negate the contribution of ethnicity in the onset of politically salient violent conflict among ethnic groups, others, such as Smith (1984), Gurr (1994), Kaufman (2001), and Estaben *et al*.(2012) acknowledge the causal roles of both ethnicity and economy or resources in the spiralling of this type of violent conflict. The data obtained from the region during my data collection exercise also reflects this bifurcation of views.

This chapter, having examined both stances very closely and critically, has provided some historical evidence that supports the claim that ethnicity (ethnic myth, symbols, solidarity) has indeed causally contributed to the violent ethnic mobilisation occurring in the Niger Delta, and that without recourse to the instrumentality of ethnicity, the Niger Delta conflict, in the manner that it currently occurs, would not exist. This does not however mean that the region would be free of conflict, but rather that the character and shape of the conflict, if it occurred at all, would certainly be different. As it is, currently ethnicity remains a major mobilisational tool used in the Niger Delta. Despite this fact, it is quite astonishing that major conflict resolution interventions in the Niger Delta have not been designed to address specifically, for instance, the hostile ethnic myths that contribute to the spiralling of regional conflict. Most of the conflict mitigation and resolution strategies implemented in the region focus more on the economic causes of the conflict. But this does not sufficiently address the problem – for violent conflict continues to persist in the region. It is the position of this thesis that any strategy capable of resolving the regional conundrum in question should be of a type that also addresses the negative impact of ethnicity in the crisis. Ethnosymbolism, this thesis contends, is a good theoretical guide towards achieving this.

CONCLUSION

This research project was prompted by a very unsettling observation – the fact that violent ethnic mobilisation has continued to persist in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria despite government efforts to eradicate it. The questions that immediately followed this observation were: why have the government's strategic interventions not been able to eradicate the Niger Delta conflict? Are there issues with them? If yes, what are they? What should have the government done differently, if anything? These are some of the issues that the current research project has had to address to successfully attain its goal.

To advance a bit more systematically in addressing its research question(s), the thesis started by critically appraising existing theoretical explanations of ethnic violence, such as the primordialist ancient hatred doctrine, the economic inequality theory of ethnic violence, the security dilemma, institutionalism, and ethnosymbolism, among others. The overall aim of this was to be able to select a theory, or some combination of theories, that best explains the reasons for the occurrence and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region.

The first theory examined was the ancient hatred doctrine – a perspective that represents the earliest theoretical attempt to explain the phenomenon of violent ethnic mobilisation. It holds that ethnic groups fight one another due to some ancient, firmly established, fixed and inflexible differences based on biological descent or ancestry (Varshney 2001). Thematically, this theory belongs to the primordialist school of thought. The overarching claim of primordialism is that ethnic identity is congenitally acquired. It is a given over which an individual has no power, as it is supposedly based on the fact of nativity and not on social construction. According to the logic of this claim, ethnicity therefore naturally and inevitably links people of the same ancestry, separating them and their way of life from those of different ancestral stock. These centripetal and centrifugal tendencies are attributed to nature itself, rather than to some social engineering or constructivism. As Geertz (1963: 109-10) puts it, one is bound to and cares for one's kinsmen, one's neighbour, one's fellow believer as a result not merely of interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by the virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself. This natural tendency to stick with and care for those of the same blood relationship (ingroup) inevitably generates the awareness of another group (the outgroup) which stands in *permanent* opposition to the former, clashing with it as they pursue overlapping interests. In the final analyses, the basic submission here is that ethnic differentiation, as well as conflicts associated with them, are natural,

inevitable and ineradicable (Geertz 1963). The current project could not adopt the primordialist theory as the framework for analysing and finding solutions to the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta because of its obvious limitations. The first of these limitations has to do with the fallacy of consanguinity. The second concerns its erroneous assumption of the fixity and 'ineradicability' of ethnic identity and conflict. The third borders on the theory's neglect of the rational calculus involved in ethnic violence. Modern research on the subject of ethnicity and ethnic violence now shows that both ethnicity and its related violent conflicts are socially constructed. Far from originating purely from natural instinct, violent ethnic conflicts are actually rationally constructed to attempt to obtain some pre-conceived objectives or interest. So, they are neither fixed nor permanent. They are constantly changing phenomena.

Having dismissed primordialism as an adequate theoretical foundation for the research, the thesis went on to examine whether the 'economic inequality theory' could fulfil that objective. The economic inequality theory holds that violent ethnic conflicts result from socio-economic inequalities existing between different ethnic blocs within an ethnically plural society. This unevenness, perceived or actual, generates grievances within a disadvantaged ethnic community, and when not properly managed spirals into violence. Some well-researched documents on the causes of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger-Delta make reference to a long-standing economic marginalisation of the region as the main driver of conflict in the area. However, this claim does not explain why ethnic violence has not spiralled in other economically disadvantaged ethnic groups in the country. Nigeria has over 300 identifiable ethnic groups (Salawu 2010), most of which complain of being economically marginalised, yet they, unlike the Niger-Delta region, have not mobilised to ethnic violence despite their grievances. In view of this, this project assumed from the outset that that there is more to the question of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region than can be adequately answered using the economic inequality argument. Hence the need for a more robust and suitable theoretical framework.

Manipulative elite theory was the next approach appraised. This theory, as evidenced in the writings of Bates (1974; 1983), Hechter (1986); and Chandra (2006) holds that ethnic conflict is the outcome of the elites' instrumentalisation and strategic manipulation of ethnicity for their egoistic political and economic ends (Bates 1974; 1983; Hechter 1986; Chandra 2006). In fact, elites and ethnic entrepreneurs actively orchestrate violent ethnic conflict to the extent that it is politically and economically rewarding for them (Brass 1997: 26). That elites play significant manipulative and mobilisational roles in the emergence and exacerbation of ethnic conflict,

especially for their own selfish interests, is not really questioned by scholars. However, it does not immediately explain why their followers are drawn into the struggle if benefits flow only to the elites (Horowitz 1998). Perhaps the followers, it might be suggested, are not aware that they are being manipulated. But again, this needs proof. Some have argued that it abnormal to expect rational adults to become part of extreme violent contestations, occasionally at the risk of their own lives, without any particular objective or interest. For this reason, elite manipulation theory has been criticised for wrongly painting a picture of 'evil politicians and innocent masses' (Kakar 1996: 150) without taking into consideration the fact that individual participants in the conflict might also be doing so for personal gain (Pandey 1992: 41). This theory is therefore not a good explanation for the involvement of the masses in the Niger Delta's violent mobilisation. A more comprehensive explanation is needed. A few other theories were also appraised, but none of these classical modernist constructivist and instrumentalist arguments were found to be convincing or comprehensive explanations for the occurrence and persistence of ethnic violence, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Only Ethnosymbolism was found capable of offering a more comprehensive and robust explanation for why this regional turmoil has continued to persist. The ability of ethnosymbolism to provide such an explanation arises from its dexterity in combining the relevant logic of existing theories of ethnic violence in order to offer a more comprehensive and adequate response to the question of why violent ethnic mobilisation occurs and persist, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Ethnic violence is a very complex phenomenon whose explanation requires a more dynamic and encompassing approach; and this is exactly what Ethnosymbolism does (Kaufman 2006). It is for this reason that it was eventually selected as the theoretical framework for the project. Unlike other theories, ethnosymbolism, as used here, recognises that ethnic violence has multiple causes that contribute to its occurrence and persistence. The Kaufmanian strand of ethnosymbolism that has served as a guiding thread for this project outlines the following necessary causal factors of ethnic violence: interest, manipulative elites, and ethnicity (ethnic myths/symbols, passion and solidarity). All these together, not one or the other, Kaufman notes, must be present and interact with one another in complex ways for ethnic violence to erupt and persist. Simply put, ethnic conflict occurs when manipulative elites tap into hostile ethnic myths to arouse an ethnic public to violence as an avenue for attaining some pre-conceived interests or objectives (Kaufman 2001). This is certainly an improvement on the classical modernist constructivist and instrumentalist theories of ethnic violence which tend to ignore or entirely deny the relevance of ethnicity in accounting for why ethnic violence occurs and persists. In no other place is this modernist attitude or tendency more obvious than in the

writings of Fearon (1994; 2003) who argues that so-called ethnic conflicts are in fact not ethnic, but at their very core are contestations over benefits. The latter, not ethnicity, explains why violence amongst groups occurs and persists. The implication of this modernist view is that ethnicity is not relevant for understanding why ethnic groups are in conflict. This is a very powerful argument, but not without limitations. A major problem associated with the modernist constructivist and instrumentalist arguments is found in their neglect or denial of the relevance of ethnicity (ethnic myths, symbols, passion, and cohesion). Yet, as persuasively explained by Estaben *et al.* (2012), ethnicity does play a major role in the onset and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation.[4] Both Gurr (1994) and Kaufman (2001), among other ethnosymbolic scholars, recognise and demonstrate the power of ethnicity, particularly ethnic myth-symbol complexes in mobilising ethnic groups for collective action, violent or otherwise.

This notwithstanding, the Nigerian government's dominant approach to understanding and resolving the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta has, regrettably, been essentially modernist – for it adumbrates that the pursuit of sectional (regional) interests is to blame for the Niger Delta crisis, and that balancing of interests, especially economic interests, will lead to the eradication of the problem of violent mobilisation in the region. This explains why the government's conflict resolution policy remedies have been predominantly economic. They have been designed in accordance with this modernist conceptual framework which either downplays or denies the vital contribution of ethnicity to the spiralling of the regional conflict, and on account of that have also failed to make provisions for addressing ethnicity's possible roles in the provocation and maintenance of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region. This thesis, however, following the view of some ethnosymbolist scholars such as Gurr (1994), Kaufman (2001) and Estaben *et al.* (2012) amongst others, recognises that both ethnicity and manipulative elites, not just 'interests', are vital in accounting why violent ethnic conflicts occur and persist, especially in the Niger Delta. In chapters 5 and 6 of the present document, the contributions of hostile ethnic myths, passion and cohesion in the rise and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation have been extensively and persuasively discussed. So, any policy that aims to resolve the Niger Delta violent conflict, but which makes no provisions for addressing the often provocative hostile ethnic myths employed by the elites in stirring an ethnic population to collective violent action will always remain insufficient and incapable of durably resolving the conundrum of violent uprisings in the Niger Delta. Measures

[4] This debate has been extensively engaged with in the introductory section of this thesis, as well as in its theoretical chapters and beyond.

hitherto taken by the government to address the problem of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta have not made any such provisions. These strategies which according to Obi *et al* (2011) may be categorised under *repressive military force*, *improved revenue allocations to the Niger Delta area*, and *the presidential amnesty programme*, are in fact, at their very core, predominantly economic. For instance, the need to increase the revenues allocated to the Niger Delta stems from the government's understanding of the regional conflict as an agitation for economic or distributive justice, and its belief that increasing the revenue routinely allocated to the region will resolve the crisis. This way of understanding the regional crisis, is, without doubt, a step in the right direction, but it certainly does not address the issue of how to prevent chauvinist and manipulative elites from tapping into popular hostile ethnic myths to stir ethnic populations to violence. The same is equally true of the presidential amnesty programme. The need to provide *economic* incentives, through the amnesty programme, to the militants in order to encourage them to abandon violent militancy is only partially, not entirely, helpful. It again fails to address the role of the hostile ethnic myths, cleavages, solidarity and passion tapped into by Niger Delta elites to mobilise the militants into fighting for a purportedly ethnic cause. Regarding the strategy of military repression, the thesis proposes that, strictly speaking, it is not to be considered a meaningful conflict resolution or mitigation strategy. It is tantamount to bullying, and should not have been employed in the first instance. This thesis does not therefore intend to discuss it further as it is not a healthy strategy worthy of examination.

What may be discerned from the foregoing is that the government's strategies for successfully addressing the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta have to date been insufficient and inadequate. They need therefore to become more robust and comprehensive, and to be of a sort that recognises not only the contributory role of 'interest', but also that of ethnicity and of manipulative elites, in the spiralling and persistence of violent ethnic confrontation. Such strategies should be the ones inspired by ethnosymbolic, rather than by the classical modernist constructivism and instrumentalism. More robust than the theoretical strands of the modernist constructivist and instrumentalist theories presented above, and which in the course of this thesis have been found to be individually insufficient or inadequate to account for why violent ethnic conflict occurs and persists, is Ethnosymbolism, and this more comprehensive theoretical perspective has served as both the theoretical and the analytical foundation and guide for the project.

Beyond Theories: A Look at the Fieldwork Data

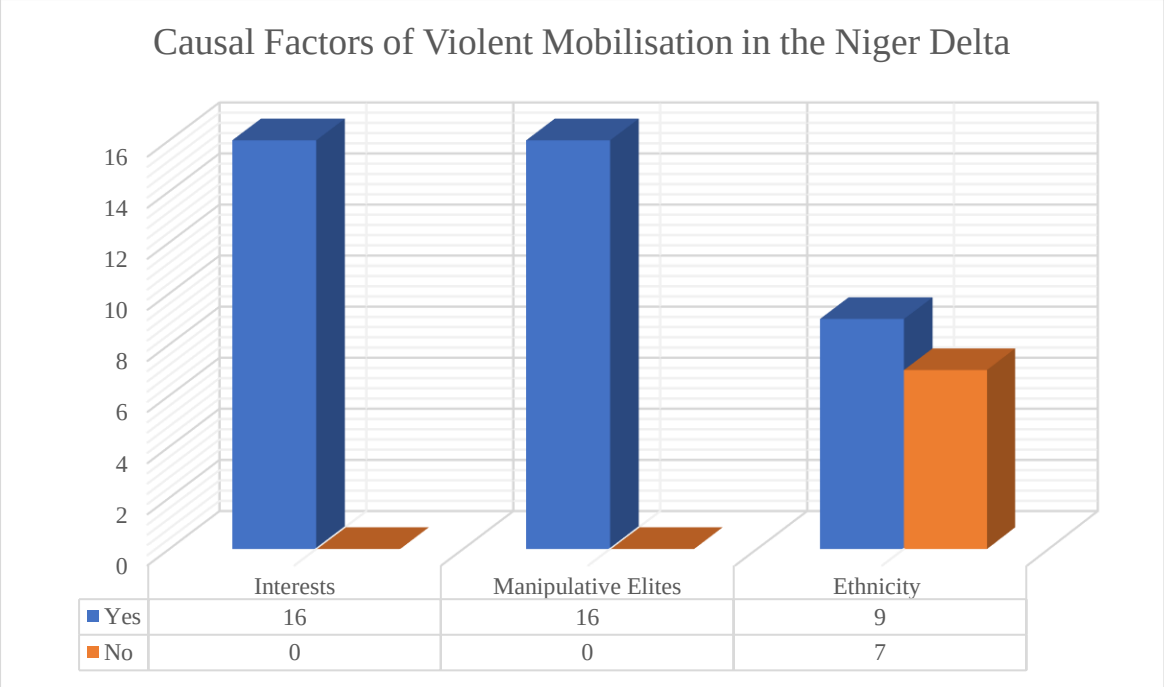
The project has not been purely theoretical. There is an empirical dimension to it –empirical data were obtained during the fieldwork in the Niger Delta region as part of the larger effort to address the project's research question(s) and fulfil its aims and objectives.

The elite interviews conducted in the Niger Delta yielded some original data that provides some useful information about how local elites understand and explain the regional violent conflict. Generally, elites are considered important shapers of socio-political affairs in every society (including mobilisation for violence or peace). So, their perception or understanding of social realities such as ethnic violence has some implications for the sort of conflict resolution policies and strategies they are likely to advocate or promote. This assumption was at the root of the fieldwork interviews, which aimed to find out what the elites had to say about the reasons for the occurrence and persistence of the Niger Delta conflict. Designed in accordance with Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theory, the questions were devised to find out how the following factors: interest, manipulative elite, and ethnicity (ethnic myths) may, or may not, have contributed to the spiralling and persistence of the regional violent conflict under investigation. A total of 16 individuals were interviewed, and the responses they provided (the findings) revealed the following:

a) That competing interests have played a major role in the onset and persistence of violent mobilisations in the Niger Delta. All the respondents affirmed this.

b) That manipulative elites have played major roles in the spiralling and persistence of the Niger Delta regional turmoil. All the respondents also affirmed this.

c) That while some respondents agreed that ethnicity (ethnic myth) is a contributory factor to the Niger Delta's violent conflict, others did not. The number of dissenting views was significantly high.



Responses of the interview respondents on the causal roles of interest, manipulative elites, and ethnicity in violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Discussion

The above findings and bar graph show that all those interviewed (100 %) agreed that competing interests, particularly in oil wealth, have played a major role in the rise and persistence of the Niger Delta violent conflict. This response corroborates the assertion made earlier: that it is unthinkable to anticipate that rational entities would engage one another in some pre-meditated and organised violent confrontations were there no sort of interest at stake. The role of interest, economic or otherwise, in violent ethnic mobilisation is, in fact, not an issue that is reasonably disputed amongst the scholars of ethnic violence. In Kaufman (2001), as well as in the writings of the economy or resource theorists of ethnic violence, compelling arguments in support of the indispensability of interest in the spiralling and persistence of ethnic violence are very well presented. So the interviewees' responses on the causal role of interest in the Niger Delta violence is not only valid, but also tallies with the views of serious scholars of ethnic violence, as well as with the ethnosymbolic theoretical framework that framed the project.

Similarly, from the above graph and findings, it is also evident that all those interviewed (100%) on the contribution or role of manipulative elites in the Niger Delta conflict were equally unanimous in their view that manipulative elites have indeed played a major role in the rise and persistence of the regional violence under investigation. I learnt from one respondent how some elites provided funds, and incited ethnic populations to actively participate in what they described as a justifiable ethno-regional mobilisation for justice, but without, however, revealing the hidden private agendas or interests they stood to gain from it. The responses provided by the interviewees aligned, not only with the ethnosymbolic theoretical framework of the thesis, but also with the widely acknowledged elite manipulation theory of ethnic conflict which holds that violent ethnic mobilisation is an outcome of elites' instrumentalisation and strategic manipulation of ethnicity for their egoistic political and economic ends; in other words, that ethnic entrepreneurs actively orchestrate violent ethnic conflict in so far as it is politically and economically rewarding for them (Brass 1997:26; Bates 1974; 1983; Hechter 1986; Chandra 2004). Within the Niger Delta, all those interviewed showed some awareness of this dimension of the regional turmoil. Again, there is no gainsaying that this sort of awareness would be helpful in developing some more tailored conflict resolution policies and strategies for preventing the influence of manipulative elites in the Niger Delta regional conflict.

The last, but certainly not the least of the findings outlined above concerns the role of ethnicity in the spiralling and persistence of violence ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta.

Quite frankly, of all the findings already discussed, this is the most controversial. While nine out of the sixteen persons interviewed agree that ethnicity has played some relevant role in the spiralling and persistence of the Niger Delta's violent conflict, the rest disagree. The number of dissenting voices was significant - nearly half of the total number of participants. This sort of bifurcation on the possible role of ethnicity in provoking and sustaining ethnic violence is not entirely new. Historically, economy-based modernist scholars of ethnic violence have always lopsidedly overemphasised the economic dimension of ethnic violence, suggesting thereby that the so-called ethnic conflicts are in fact not ethnic, but are rather conflicts over interests, especially economic. Such views are evident in the writings of some modernist scholars such as Fearon (2003) and Muller and Seligson (1987), among others, who either downplay or deny outright the causal contribution of ethnicity to the onset and persistence of violence of an ethnic sort.

Now, without denying that interest causally contributes to provoking and maintaining violent conflicts in general, this thesis does, however, observe that those violent confrontations involving ethnic groups are more complex in terms of their causalities. In them, ethnicity does play some important roles as an organisational and mobilisational principle. In Chapter five, an elaborate explanation of how ethnicity, particularly ethnic myths, passion and solidarity are strategically tapped into to mobilise ethnic populations for collective action is well presented, building on the intellectual traditions of some of the finest scholars of ethnic and national conflicts, such as Smith (1984), Gurr(1994), Kaufman (2001), and Estaben (2012) amongst other ethnosymbolic scholars.

It is therefore the position of this thesis that violent ethnic mobilisation, particularly in the Niger Delta, can neither be fully understood nor resolved unless the contribution of ethnicity to the crises is acknowledged, and adequate provisions for how this should be addressed also made. Downplaying, or denying outright the causal relevance of ethnicity to the Niger Delta conflict is a major reason why adequate conflict resolution policies on the crises have not yet been formulated. Hence the persistence of the Niger Delta regional turmoil. Ethnosymbolism, a theoretical approach that purposively combines the relevant logic of existing theories of ethnic violence in order to provide a more comprehensive and robust framework for understanding and resolving the problem of violent ethnic conflicts is what this thesis proposes to the Nigerian government as a way forward. Policies and strategies formulated in accordance with this theory would be comprehensive, robust, and capable of durably resolving the enigma of violent ethnic mobilisation that has rocked the Niger Delta region for decades now.

The Final Word

The foregoing shows that both the Nigerian government and some of the elites interviewed in the Niger Delta have inadequate understanding of the causes of the Niger Delta's ethnic violence. This is evident both in the government's conflict resolution strategies and in the responses provided by a significant number of the elites interviewed. Neither camp has shown any serious awareness of the causal role of ethnicity to the spiralling and persistence of ethnic violence. Their opinions are basically offshoots of the classical modernist constructivist and instrumentalist arguments. Classical modernist theories are in the habit of downplaying or denying the causal relevance of ethnicity to the spiralling and persistence of ethnic violence. But as has been persuasively argued and demonstrated in the course of this thesis, especially

in Chapters 1, 5 and 6, ethnicity remains a major contributory factor to the rise and persistence of ethnic violence in general, and in the Niger Delta in particular. So, any theoretical attempt to solve the problem of violent ethnic conflict, but which either downplays or denies the causal contribution of ethnicity in violent ethnic mobilisation will always remain inadequate and incapable of yielding a durable solution to the problem of violent ethnic conflict. Classical modernist theories of ethnic violence are guilty of this error of negligence or denial, and this is why they have been, in the cause of this research project, found to be unable either to account for why ethnic violence occurs and persists, or to resolve it.

Regrettably, this is the approach that has been taken by the government in conceptualising and attempting to resolve the regional turmoil. Its approach has been predominantly, and nearly exclusively economic. The Nigerian government's understanding of the Niger Delta's violent conflict as originating from struggles over valuable interest (oil wealth) has led to the promotion of policies that aim only to balance interests, or cushion the adverse effects of actual or perceived economic inequalities in the region. Increments in the revenues allocated to the Niger Delta, as well as the Presidential Amnesty programme have been based on the government's belief that the regional problem is basically an economic one. Because of this the government has not bothered to make provisions for addressing the contribution of ethnicity to the regional conflict. While this thesis acknowledges that the regional crisis does have an economic dimension, it nonetheless holds that the roles of manipulative elites and ethnicity (ethnic myth, solidarity, and passion) are equally indispensable contributors to the violent turmoil being witnessed in the Niger Delta region.

Similar to the government, some of the elites interviewed in the Niger Delta are guilty of this error of neglect or denial. The data provided above indicates some sort of confusion amongst local elites regarding the causal relevance of ethnicity to the spiralling and persistence of the Niger Delta violent conflict. They are diametrically opposed in their views. For instance, 7 of 16 individuals who responded on this issue deny that ethnicity has anything to do with the regional conflict. They, like the government, understand it from a strictly economic point of view. The position of this thesis, however, is that ethnicity (hostile ethnic myths, passion and solidarity) has contributed to the regional crises. Concrete historical examples have been used to back up this claim. Although the rest of the respondents (9) agreed that ethnicity has had some impact on the regional crises, there is no evidence of any serious advocacy on their part to push for the recognition of this perspective in the government's conflict resolution policy

strategies implemented in the region. This again leaves one wondering how firm or convinced they are of the ethnic dimension of the Niger Delta regional turmoil.

So, the central and overarching position of this thesis is that existing causal explanations for violent ethnic mobilisation and its persistence in the Niger-Delta are incomprehensive and inadequate. They are merely narrow and isolating extrapolations of the classical modernist constructivist and instrumentalist doctrines which have been judged inadequate to account for why violent ethnic mobilisations occur and persist. Logically, any conflict resolution strategy that is based on these insufficient modernist doctrines is also bound to be inadequate and this is exactly the problem with the Nigerian government's conflict resolution interventions in the Niger Delta region. Its strategies are fundamentally inspired by the by the theoretically lopsided classical modernist economy-based theories of ethnic violence which tend to downplay or deny outright the causal significance of ethnicity in the spiralling and persistence of ethnic violence. On account of that, they have become inadequate and unable to resolve the Niger Delta regional conflict. Hence the persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region despite government efforts to eradicate it.

This thesis therefore advocates that any theoretical approach capable of robustly addressing the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta needs to be complex and comprehensive, rather simplistic and lopsided. It has to be the sort that makes provisions, not only for how the problem of competing economic interests may be resolved, but also for how the negative contributions of both the manipulative elites and ethnicity (hostile ethnic myths) in the rise and persistence the regional crisis may be effectively addressed. Ethnosymbolism – a theoretical approach that creatively and purposefully combines the relevant logics of existing perspectives on violent ethnic mobilisation meets this requirement and should therefore form the theoretical basis and framework for understanding, explaining, and resolving the problem of ethnic violence, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Ethnosymbolism is what this thesis offers to the Nigerian government in its effort to resolve the Niger Delta's violent conflict – a crisis that has destroyed very many lives and properties in the Niger Delta region.

Implications of the Thesis for Policy Making

Throughout this thesis, and in accordance with the requirements of the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theory that guides it, this document has been able to establish and demonstrate

that *competing interests*, *manipulative elites* and *ethnicity (hostile ethnic myths in particular)* constitute the indispensable causal factors responsible for the rise and persistence of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region. In the pages that follow, I present some major implications of this affirmation (findings) for the formulation of conflict resolution policy and strategies for the Niger Delta. The aim is to provide some sort of guide, or stimulating suggestions to assist policy makers in the formulation of more adequate and robust conflict resolution policies and strategies capable of eradicating the Niger Delta conflict. These are as follows:

(1) The government should re-examine the context of violent ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta and painstakingly identify its real causes and drivers. Socio-political and economic exclusion and marginalisation of the Niger Delta area are among the causal factors highlighted by respondents as constituting a major reason for violent mobilisation in the region – a view also upheld by Obi *et al.* (2011). It is therefore imperative that these incidents of marginalisation or exclusion are carefully identified and corrected through some carefully formulated policies aimed at fairly balancing the interests, economic or otherwise, of different ethno-regional groups that make up the Nigerian polity. Doing this is very important because injustice, understood here in the classical Aristotelian sense as the denial of one's own or one's people's due, is always a major reason why individuals or groups harbour grievances and eventually mobilise for collective action, sometimes violently, in a bid obtain what they believe is rightfully their due.

(2) There is also a need for the people of the Niger Delta, or their true representatives, to be allowed to participate fully in designing and deciding on the conflict resolution policies to be implemented in their region. Exclusion of the people from the deliberative and decision-making processes on issues that directly affect them is one of the main reasons why they quite frequently feel deceived and consequently protest, sometimes violently. On a number of occasions, measures have been unilaterally implemented in the region without due consultation with the people of Niger Delta. Numerous incidents of brutal military operations in the region are instances of this. As observed by Rousseau, people are generally less likely to wantonly flout laws and regulations that they have effectively participated in setting up, for these represent their collective *opus* or what Rousseau refers to as the *volonté générale;* that is, their collective will, in which the will of the individual members of society is contained and expressed (Rousseau 1762). This presents a good case for involving the Niger Deltans in

deliberations and decisions on how best to resolve the phenomenon of violent uprising in their region. Furthermore, in accordance with Rawls (1999)'s trend of thought, this thesis also believes that involving Niger Deltans in the process of designing the conflict resolution policies for their region is also a way of guaranteeing, at least, that the government is acting fairly and without ulterior motives, thus increasing the chances of these policies being fruitfully implemented without being undermined.

(3) There is also a need to educate the public about how to detect, avoid or resist elite manipulation. There is some evidence that manipulative elites, in their shrewd pursuit of private interests, have played some smart roles in stirring members of the public to violent conflicts in which they, not the Niger Delta public, stood to benefit. Some violent uprisings in the Niger Delta have been provoked by manipulative elites as a means of consolidating their grip on economic and political positions, or to enable them to obtain other personal advantages disguised as the public interest. In Duruji (2008; 2015) one sees how ethnic militias in Nigeria, including those of the Niger Delta, have become increasingly transformed as some form of pressure group.

Having said this, I note that it is equally important to make a distinction between genuine efforts by noble elites to mobilise people for good causes, such as pulling them together to oppose an autocratic government or a dictatorship. Ideals of Democracy and civil disobedience, as evident in the writings of Dahl (1998), Skinner (2002) and Rawls (1999), encourage this. However, the challenge for the public here lies in being able to detect when mobilisation for collective action is either manipulative, or for a noble and heroic objective. It is for this reason that this project recommends that the people of the Niger Delta be trained and sensitised to spot the difference. It behoves the government to develop programmes on how to actualise all this, especially as it promises to curb the damaging impact of manipulative elites in the spiralling and maintenance of the Niger Delta violent conflict.

(4) Provisions for properly and effectively addressing the negative impacts of ethnicity (hostile ethnic myths, passion and ethnocentrism) on violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta should be made.

Ethnicity, just like nationalism, is like a double-edged sword – simultaneously unifying and divisive. While ethnicity unites individuals who believe themselves to originate from a common ancestry – providing them with a vast range of mythical narratives that usually serve

as *points de repères* and motivation, the in-group solidarity, pride and impetus that these narratives enable have the tendency, when not properly managed, to lead to ethnocentrism and preponderance of one ethnic group over another; further exacerbating the ripples of ethnic tensions, security dilemmas and eventually full-blown violent confrontation.

The role of hostile ethnic myths, passion and solidarity in the onset and maintenance of ethnic violence is a key subject discussed and affirmed by ethnosymbolic scholars, as well as by this thesis. It is, therefore, the duty of the government to develop measures aimed at tackling the negative impacts of ethnicity on the Niger Delta violent conflict. All the policies hitherto employed by the government in their attempts to resolve the regional problem seem to have either vitiated, neglected or ignored outright that ethnicity is a relevant causal factor in the regional turmoil. Ignoring, downplaying or denying this fact does not in any way remove its effect, but rather renders the problem intractable, and difficult to resolve. This is the reason why the current project strongly recommends that some well-adapted policy measures for addressing the causal impact of ethnicity on the Niger Delta conflict be developed and implemented. Without this, the Niger Delta violent conflict, in the manner that it currently occurs, cannot be resolved. This is because, ethnicity, as the research findings show, is one principle of organisation and mobilisation in the Niger Delta violent conflict.

(5) The government should do more to protect the right of the Niger Deltans to free speech, especially when they critically appraise the government's conflict resolution strategies in the region. It is in allowing people the liberty to freely express their opinions without fear of being victimised that potentially better alternatives measures for solutioning the regional conflict may become available.

This proposal has been inspired by a number of incidents I observed in the course of the data collection exercise in the Niger Delta. Some of the interviewees, for instance, declined to take part in the interview process despite having previously agreed to participate. The reason for their abstention was initially not entirely clear to me. However, it was later suggested to me that this may be not unrelated to the sensitive nature of the research topic. Some of the interview questions, for instance, required them to provide information that may be critical of government policies in the Niger Delta. In a country like Nigeria where the prosperity of so-called elites depends hugely on maintaining cordial patron-client relationships with those who wield government power – the 'big men' as Chabal and Daloz (1999) refer to them, avoiding circumstances that might compel them to be overtly critical of government strategies seems

very. But then, continual abstention from honestly reviewing government policies in the Niger Delta, especially when they have not been very effective, only prevents the emergence of better alternatives for resolving the problem of violent mobilisation in the region under study. It is for this reason that this thesis suggests an increased measure of protection for the right of every Nigerian, especially those of the Niger Delta, to freely air their opinions as honestly as possible without fear of being blackmailed or victimised.

Original Contributions to Knowledge

(1) One major contribution made by this research is the introduction of ethnosymbolism as a superior framework for examining and resolving the problem of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region. In the course of this project, I observed that most existing causal explanations for the occurrence and persistence of the regional crises are a bit problematic – some are merely narrow and individually isolating extrapolations of the classical modernist constructivist and instrumentalist doctrines such as the economic inequality theory, resource curse theory, institutionalism, greed versus grievance theory, and elite manipulation theory, which, individually, have been judged inadequate in accounting for why violent ethnic mobilisations occur and persist. The inadequacy arises mainly from their ignorance or neglect of the important role of ethnicity (ethnic myth-symbol complexes) in the rise and persistence of violent conflicts amongst ethnic groups. Although it is fair to recognise that some of these weaknesses have been to some extent corrected in the work of Ifeka (2006), Anugwom (2011), and Adunbi (2015) amongst others, who have done well in explaining the contributory roles of ethnic myth-symbol complexes in violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta, it is also worth observing that they did not go further to explain how these elements synergise with other causal factors of ethnic violence to *de facto* generate the regional crises that currently ravages the Niger Delta region. In other words, they have not explained the mechanism of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta. It is therefore at this point that this thesis pushes the frontier of the literature a bit further by introducing a more englobing, comprehensive, and robust theory of ethnic violence - ethnosymbolism. Drawing extensively on the latter, this project has been able to creatively combine relevant logics of hitherto existing, valid, but individually isolating, explanations of Niger Delta conflict in order to formulate a more robust account that compellingly explains why violent ethnic conflict occurs and persists in the region. This synergistic character of ethnosymbolism enables it produce a combined explanatory potency

that is more robust than that produced by each of the individual theories it integrates. This was discussed in detail in chapter one. Although ethnosymbolism is now increasingly gaining acceptance within the domain of ethnic conflict studies and resolution as a more thoroughgoing framework for evaluating and resolving the conundrum of violent ethnic mobilisation, this theoretical approach has, prior to this point, not been used to analyse or solve the problem of ethnic violence in the Niger Delta region. Yet the complexity of the regional crises requires the rigorous and comprehensive intervention that ethnosymbolism provides.

(2) The second contribution of this project can be seen in the extra-European validation of the universalisability of Kaufman's ethnosymbolic theory. In two separate articles published on the subject of ethnic violence by Young (2002) and Chaim Kaufmann (2002), Kaufman's *Modern Hatred* was criticised as an over-ambitious piece of research that seeks to formulate a universalisable theory of extreme violent ethno-national conflict. The grounds for this criticism originated from the fact that nearly all the data and case-studies obtained and used by Kaufman come from a single geographical area – the Balkans. His critics were therefore of the opinion that he ought to have diversified and expanded his data in order to strengthen the validity and credibility of his theory – for seeking to formulate a universalisable theory on the basis of a limited and non-diverse data set is a bit problematic. These criticisms are, to say the least, valid, and this thesis agrees with them that Kaufman's work would have benefited from widening and diversifying his case studies and data. The criticism does not however nullify the validity of Kaufman's ethnosymbolic theory. It rather contends that the theory ought to have been tested in other contexts of ethnic violence. This thesis has now filled that gap, even if just partially, by creatively applying Kaufman's theory in the Niger Delta (Africa). The use of Kaufman's theory to investigate the Niger Delta crisis has been incredibly rewarding, for it 'perfectly' captures and explains the dynamics of the violent ethnic conflict in the region. As can be seen in chapter one, when compared with other extant theoretical explanations of the regional conflict, Kaufman's ethnosymbolic theory proves to be more comprehensive, thoroughgoing, and robust. So, the successful, but also creative application of Kaufman's theory in the Niger Delta helps neutralise the criticism levelled against him by both Young (2002) and Chaim Kaufman (2002), and in so doing further confirms the universalisability of Kaufman's theory. In some way, therefore, the current research makes up for what is lacking in Kaufman's work.

(3) Conceptual clarification is another way in which this thesis has made an important contribution to knowledge. Concepts such as interest, manipulative elites, and ethnicity have

been described by Kaufman as necessary factors required to successfully explain the origins of violent ethnic mobilisation. These are meaning-laden concepts that are usually subject to a plurality of interpretations. Hence the need to clarify the exact sense in which they are used. What is however a bit startling is that Kaufman did not bother to provide clear definitions of these concepts, or the exact sense in which they were being used his major work: *Modern Hatreds*. Yet, conceptual elucidation is of great importance in avoiding, or at least minimising, misinterpretation. What I have therefore done, especially in Chapters one, four and five of the thesis, is to go through Kaufman's major works in order to discern, capture, and communicate the senses in which these concepts have been used, as well as how they have been understood and deployed in the context of this research project. This is why the current thesis may rightly be described, amongst other things, as a "Companion of Kaufman". This is not because it always agrees with all that Kaufman says (quite the contrary); but mainly because it supplies some key elements ignored or omitted in Kaufman's work, including the definition of concepts. In doing this, the thesis contributes to enabling and enhancing an understanding of the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic theory.

(4) Manipulative elite theory is well-known and frequently utilised to analyse the context of violent ethnic mobilisation. Prominent scholars of ethnic violence such as Hechter, Horowitz, Bates, and Brass have, for instance, all drawn on this theory in their various explanations of the causes of ethno-national violence. For them, there is no doubt that the agency of manipulative elites is required to provoke and sustain ethnic violence, especially in view of their egoistic ends. Although Kaufman agrees and upholds this view, he goes a bit further to explain the mechanism of elite manipulation (how they *de facto* manipulate) – an aspect not sufficiently developed by theorists before him. According to him, in order for elites to successfully cause ethnic violence to occur, certain pre-conditions (hostile ethnic myths, political space, and the emotion of fear) must exist or be created where they are absent, for they are like the raw materials with which manipulative elites fabricate violent conflicts. This thesis has found these Kaufmanian pre-conditions for ethnic violence extremely helpful in explaining how manipulative elites have been able to successfully mobilise ethnic populations to violence in the Niger Delta. The case of the Adaka Boro-led violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta is an instance of this. This was discussed in detail in Chapter five. On the other hand, however, I was able to observe, in the course of my research, that these same Kaufmanian pre-conditions for ethnic violence were also utilised by Ken Saro-Wiwa – who successfully mobilised his ethnic group to some potent, but non-violent, protests against the Federal

government of Nigeria and the oil multinationals for injustices against his people. Yet, in Kaufman's works, the above-mentioned pre-conditions were only considered in relation to manipulative elites. No mention was made of how non-manipulative elites could use the same means *to mobilise for collective but non-violent ethnic action*. This fact, omitted by Kaufman, has been rediscovered and highlighted here. In doing this, the thesis enhances our understanding of the Kaufmanian mechanism of elite manipulations to violence.

Research Limitation and Suggestions for Further Investigation

This project has provided a causal analysis of the context of violent mobilisation in the Niger Delta with a view to clarifying why the regional turmoil has continued to persist despite government efforts to eradicate it. Through the ethnosymbolic theoretical approach employed, the thesis has been able to carefully identify a number of necessary factors that contribute in a complex way to the regional imbroglio. It has also been able to make suggestions about how to address these issues. However, what is lacking in this project, and is therefore needed for the purposes of complementing it, is a well and carefully articulated conflict resolution action plan that is inspired both by the current thesis, and constructed in accordance with the demands of the ethnosymbolic theoretical approach. In the course of this project, this has been found to be the most appropriate framework for a robust and comprehensive explanation of, and solutions to, the conundrum of violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This is what is partly lacking in the current research (its limitation) and which therefore needs to be provided by another line of investigation – a complementary research project that builds on and expands this one.

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APPENDIX

University of BRISTOL

SPAIS School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies

Data Protection Form

Research involving humans by all academic and related Staff and Students in the School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies is subject to the standards set out in the Code of Practice on Research Ethics.

Applications to external bodies for research funding must obtain *prior* clearance from the REC.

Name: Charles Chuka, Agboeze Student number: 1345012

Supervisor/s.: Drs. Adrian Flint and Christie Ryerson

Information Security – Summary Points:

- Plan carefully the data you need to collect.
- Personal data held for research must not be used for any other purpose.
- Ensure the purpose for which personal data is collected and processed is made clear to the data subject(s).
- Ensure explicit consent has been obtained from the data subject(s).
- Make data anonymous so that individuals cannot, by any means, be identified.
- Use encrypted storage media or hard drive for storing any sensitive or personal data.
- Ensure paper files containing personal data are kept secure, for example in locked filing cabinets or in rooms that are locked when unoccupied.
- Delete data once no longer required for the use for which it was gathered.

Please answer 'YES' or 'NO' to the following statements.

I confirm my research data[i] will not be:

1	Processed in a way that could cause damage or distress to an individual	Yes
2	Published in a form that identifies individuals	Yes
3	Shared with people or organisations outside the University (including publication on the web)[ii]	Yes
4	Using sensitive or personal data[iii]	Yes

I confirm that management of my research data will adhere to the University of Bristol Information Security Policy which can be found at: http://www.bris.ac.uk/infosec/

Specifically, I will ensure that:

5	Any/all sensitive and personal data stored or processed off campus is encrypted	Yes
6	Security arrangements are put in place to prevent theft of data	Yes
7	Access to electronic and physical data will be restricted	Yes
8	Password protection procedures will be used to protect electronic data	Yes
9	All data is retained for secure disposal after processing[iv] and after my degree has been awarded	Yes

If you have answered 'NO' to any of the above please explain under FURTHER DETAILS:

FURTHER DETAILS

You are also required to give a FULL explanation of where ALL personal data (whether held on paper, audio/videotape or electronically) will be stored:

What security arrangements do you have in place if data is stored off-site?

Please continue on separate sheet if necessary

I confirm that I have read and will fully comply with the University's policies on the ethical conduct of research at:

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/practice-training/researchethicspolicy.pdf

I confirm that I have read the University's policy on data storage and protection at: http://www.bris.ac.uk/secretary/dataprotection/guidelines.html and will fully comply with it.

Signature of Project Leader : **Charles Chuka Agboeze** Date **21/01/2017**

Please add electronic signature or type name here

Please email completed form to susie.potts@bristol.ac.uk

Explanatory Notes:

Research Data refers to raw data that has yet to be anonymised and should be differentiated from Research Product which refers to the final dissertation**.**

[1] Although it is permissible to share findings outside of the University, including with research participants

[1] **Sensitive Data** means data containing the following information:

- Racial or ethnic origin;
- Political opinions;
- Religious or other similar beliefs;
- Trade Union membership;
- Physical or mental health condition;
- Sexual life;
- Convictions or alleged criminal acts;
- Any data that is likely to cause embarrassment and/or injury of any kind if made public.

Personal Data refers to information about a living individual who can be identified from that information and other information which is in, or likely to come into, the data controller's possession.

- Dead persons are not regarded as data subjects, nor are companies or organisations (although, for example, data relating to 'the Vice Chancellor of the University of Bristol' would be regarded as personal data because it is possible to identify a particular individual from that designation);
- Individuals can be identified not only by name but by any sort of identification, such as national insurance number, employee number, patient number;
- Includes for example:
    - The data subject is referred to by means of a code, but the data user has other information that identifies the individual by means of that code; and including any expression of opinion about the individual; and
    - An expression of opinion about the individual – 'Student X has convictions for possession of cannabis (fact) and he is now selling it to other students (opinion)'.

[1] **Processing** means obtaining, recording or holding the data or carrying out any operation or set of operations on data.

Application for Ethical Approval

Research involving humans by all academic and related Staff and Students in the School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies is subject to the standards set out in the University of Bristol Ethics of Research Policy and Procedure which can be found at: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/practice-training/researchethicspolicy.pdf

It is a requirement that prior to the commencement of all funded and non-funded research that this form be completed and submitted to the School's Research Ethics Committee (REC). The REC will be responsible for issuing certification that the research meets acceptable ethical standards and will, if necessary, require changes to the research methodology or reporting strategy.

A copy of the research proposal/upgrade document which details methods and reporting strategies must be submitted (as a separate document) together with the research ethics application.

Applications to external bodies for research funding must obtain *prior* clearance from the REC.

Name: Charles Chuka, Agboeze

Student number: 1345012

(if applicable)

Supervisor/s (if applicable): Drs. Adrian FLINT and Christie RYERSON

Please answer 'YES' or 'NO' to the following questions in the boxes below:

Programme Title : PhD

Title of research project: Why violent ethnic mobilizations occur and persist: A case study of violent ethnic mobilization in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

Questionnaire:

1	Does your research involve living human subjects?	Yes
2	Does your research involve only the analysis of secondary data? If yes please specify.	No
3	Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g. children, people with learning disabilities, your own students)	No
4	Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g. students at school, members of self-help group, residents of nursing home). If 'yes' please give details under 'Further Details'.	No
5	Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)	No
6	Is it likely that the study could induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	No
7	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	No
8	Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS?	No
9	Will you give your informants a written summary of your research and its uses? If 'No' please explain your reason(s) under 'Further Details'.	Yes
10	Will you give your informants a verbal summary of your research and its uses?	Yes
11	Will your informants be identified in your research? If 'yes' please explain why this would be important to your research under 'Further Details'	No
12	Will any monitoring devices only be used openly and with the permission of informants?	Yes
13	Have you considered the implications of your research intervention on your informants?	Yes
14	Will your research be available to informants and the general public without restrictions placed by sponsoring authorities?	Yes
15	Does your research involve fieldwork in the community i.e. face-to-face interaction with person(s) off University premises?	Yes
16	Does your research involve travel outside the UK?	Yes
17	Have you completed a risk assessment form?	Yes
18	Have you sought advice on data protection including the safe handling and storage of data and the security of computer equipment	No

19	Are there any other ethical issues arising from your research?	No

Further details (please include a short explanation of your methodology i.e. who you intend to interview, how/where your interviews will take place and a brief summary of the data you hope to collect)

Within the academic field ethnic conflict studies and resolution, my research investigates the phenomenon violent ethnic mobilisation in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. Using the Kaufmanian ethnosymbolic approach to the study of ethnic conflict as a theoretical and analytical guide, the project aspires to expound why mobilisation to ethnic violence has continued to persist in the afro-mentioned region despite governmental and non-governmental efforts at eradicating it. This is the core issue around which the project's research questions articulate.

For the data collection, the following methods are envisaged: Interview (Semi-structured), government policy documents, and relevant books on the subject. The proposed semi-structured interview will interrogate the following categories of persons: local traditional rulers and the politicians who serve as proxy for the ethnic militants.

Signed: **Charles Chuka, AGBOEZE** **Date 21/01/2017**

Please add electronic signature or type name here

Please email your completed application document(s) to Susie.Potts@bristol.ac.uk

****Please submit a summary of your research proposal with this application****

Name: Charles Chuka Agboeze

Student No: 1345012

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February 2017

Dear Charles

Re: Research Ethics Approval

This is to confirm in writing, as previously advised, that the School Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your submitted documents, and is pleased to give full ethical approval for your project.

You are advised to take particular notice of the regulations concerning data storage and data encryption. The Information Commissioner has made it clear that *personal* data subject to the Data Protection Act must be encrypted whenever it is "transported" or "conveyed". This includes data stored on physical media (laptops, CD/DVDs, USB drives, etc.) as well as data transmitted electronically (email, FLUFF, etc.). Failure to do so is a breach of the 7th data protection principle and could result in action being taken against the University in the event of data loss.

- Definitions of personal data and sensitive data can be found here: http://www.bris.ac.uk/secretary/dataprotection/glossary.html .
- Information about data storage can be found here: http://www.bris.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/research/.
- Information about data encryption can be found here: http://www.bris.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/encrypt/.

You are encouraged to maintain contact with your supervisors and Dr Paula Surridge, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee, informing them of any changes that may occur to your plans or to your research. Should you have any queries or concerns, the Ethics Committee will be pleased to help and support you in any way possible.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Susie Potts

On behalf of SPAIS Research Ethics Committee

The End
